

**MINUTES OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING
28 JUNE 2023**

HELD AT THE COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE, WORCESTER

Attendees

Lyndon Bracewell (LB)	Cycling interest
Georgina Britten Long (GBL)	Landowner Interest
Gordon Bunker (GB)	Motorised use of minor highways and byways interest
John Cuthbertson (JC)	Social inclusion interest
Stephen Glazzard (SG)	Motorised use of minor highways and byways interest
Rowena Lloyd (RL)	Representing Worcestershire County Council PRow
Tony Kerbey (TK)	Secretary
Bobbie Matulja (BM)	Chair
Mike Rouse (MR)	County Council Cabinet member
Sandra Starkey (SS)	Youth Interest
Guest – Tom Cording	PRow Mapping Officer

Notices – Procedure in the event of a fire, trip hazards in the meeting room and consent to record.

ITEMS

1. Apologies

Julian Grubb (JG)	Waterways Interest
Peter Hughes (PH)	Business interest
Linda Robinson (LR)	South Worcestershire District Council interest
Late apologies – John Jeffrey (JJ)	Parish Interest

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chair asked members to declare any personal or business interest in the agenda items. SG Declared that he is now a Parish Councillor.

3. Confirmation of Minutes.

The Chair asked members to confirm the minutes of the previous meeting 2 February 2023 – **carried**.

4. Actions.

There were no outstanding actions from the LAF meeting in Feb 23 or the Sub-Group meeting in Apr 23.

5. Matters Arising

Outdoor Accessibility Guidance - JC Provided the LAF and the PRoW team with a copy of 'Outdoor Accessibility Guidance' published by 'Paths for All' ([Outdoor Accessibility Guidance](#)) which was distributed to members and passed to Phil Coulson, PRoW Operations Manager. JC and Phil Coulson are discussing the accessibility content of the PRoW Essentials training course which is completed by all Parish Path Wardens, Recreational Route Wardens and volunteer groups.

Worcestershire Green Infrastructure Strategy Consultation – The Chair's final response was submitted 31 May 23.

Resignation of Lindsey Umfreville - The Chair confirmed the resignation of Lindsey Umfreville after 14 years as a LAF Member (Landowner Interest) and thanked her for her contribution. **GBL** asked about specific vacancies and the Chair/Secretary covered the need to maintain a balance between interest groups. The Chair mentioned that a new application has been received for membership of the LAF (Landowner Interest). The Chair, **SG** and **GB** congratulated the forum on its activities, engagement, and inclusivity.

West Midlands Walking Trail Stakeholder Survey – Draft distributed to members mid-April. The final LAF survey submission was made 31 May 23. It encouraged the project coordinators to work closely with the 8 Hills Regional Park and Rail Trails projects.

BHS Bridle gate trial update. The trial was formally launched 24 June 23. The Chair gave a presentation covering the relative merits of the trial gates, their installation, and the mechanism for data collection. This amounted to a 'first impression' which will be informed by ongoing walker/equestrian use, a maintenance/reliability assessment and long-term value for money (a pdf version of the slides is included in the main presentation distributed with these minutes). Questions were taken covering:

The closure speed of the gates and their utility for disabled ramblers. **JC** outlined his experiences at the trial.

Responsibility for the installation and maintenance of gates. **RL** explained the County Council's role when working with landowners.

8 Hills Regional Park – The June 2023 project update was distributed to members and contains a link to the report on Stage 1 – 3 of the Regional Park's Spatial Framework ([Report](#)). The LAF will monitor development.

WBL Greenway Update on Funding – The feasibility study for the Worcestershire section of the route is now fully funded.

Deregulation Act cut-off date moved to 2031 – The time-pressure for the submission of

DMMOs, based purely on historic evidence remains, and **RL** expects the number of such applications to increase. The Deregulation Act also has wider implications for the way in which applications and other PRow matters are processed but the detail is yet to be released.

6. Speakers

Canal and Rivers Trust Activities Nationally and in the West Midlands - Richard Preston Regional Operations Manager Richard Preston delivered a wide-ranging and informative presentation covering the structure, funding and activities of the CRT (a pdf version of the slides is included in the main presentation distributed with these minutes). Although Richard's details are on the slides, the best point of contact for CRT matters, in the West Midlands is the Area Operations Manager, Gemma Hessey, at Gemma.Hessey@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Questions were taken covering:

Footfall measurement cameras – **JC** asked if they were protected against vandalism. Richard said they are mounted on a pole and need a permanent power supply (battery version have an 8-day life). Low-resolution cameras are preferred to pressure pads etc. because they reveal the nature of use (walking/cycling, families, groups etc.).

Towpath improvement width – **LB** asked if it was CRT policy to restrict towpath improvement to widths of 1.8 metres. Richard explained that, whilst there was a balance to be maintained with ecological concerns, there was no hard and fast blanket rule on width.

Accessibility and Radar Gates – **JC** asked about CRT policy on gates. Richard is trying to remove restrictions wherever possible with a view to replacing gates with staggered barriers to increase accessibility whilst discouraging illegal use.

Equestrian use of towpaths – The **Chair** asked about the CRT's position on towpaths and mounted horse use. Richard explained that large sections of towpath are unsuitable for mounted horses due to the infrastructure (bridges etc.) which were originally designed for unmounted horses. Often, the CRT do not have sufficient land to accommodate equestrian use but are willing to look at specific proposals.

Bat conservation lighting and user safety – **JC**. Richard covered the use of solar light studs to delineate the edges of towpaths and the maintenance of 'dark corridors' for wildlife. **JC** asked about red/pink bat lighting. **Action** Richard agreed to provide feedback on CRT's policy.

Ongoing towpath improvement in Worcestershire – **RL**. Richard outlined several small projects but explained that funding in some rural areas is unavailable.

MR encouraged CRT to investigate funds available to individual councillors and local councillor groups in support of small projects.

7. Public Rights of Way Team Report

RL provided an update on the activities of the WCC PRow team. A PDF version of the report is attached for LAF members. Statistics are valid up to the end of April 23. Questions were taken covering:

Breakdown of long-term closures - **GB** and the **Chair** wanted to understand the nature of the long-term closures. **Action** RL agreed to investigate the possible provision of long-term closure figures divided by grounds for closure.

Closures required by developers – **GBL**. RL explained the process for dealing with planning system and construction-related closures.

Walking/cycling links to Worcester Parkway - **GB**. RL explained that walking/cycling links to the new Parkway town/estate and on to the railway station is part of Active Travel planning.

Capacity of the PRow Essentials course - **GB**. GB may have candidates for the course and will pass through TK.

Use of Probation Service - **GBL**. RL outlined why WCC can no longer accommodate Probation Service work parties. **Post-meeting note, from Phil Coulson, PRow Operations Manager** - *“Throughout the project there were several safety and practical issues that limited the scope of the work they could do. An example being the nature of some of the offenders and the potential risk they presented to the public. This limited where we could use them, although closely supervised, they could not work in places where there might be children or vulnerable people nearby. Further to these on-going issues, clarification to Department of Justice Guidelines meant that offenders must now be provided with toilet and welfare facilities, which is impractical on our sites. Given this, the Probation Service had no choice but to withdraw from our work.”*

Accessibility of the Worcestershire Way - **JC**. RL reiterated WCC’s aim to improve accessibility throughout and would consider all representations.

8. Items for Noting

Items were covered elsewhere in the meeting.

9. Topics for Future Meetings

- ROWIP Development.
- Enforcement Officer Role and Procedure
- De-Regulation Act and impact on PRow.
- The West Midlands Circular Walking Trail.
- Malvern Hills AONB.
- Results of BHS Gates Trial.
- Duckworth Worcestershire Trust – General and conservation vs public access.

10. Any Other Business

Membership - Renewal of membership for LB, GBL, JC, PH, SS, GT until February 25. LB, GBL, JC and SS were in attendance and agreed to renew their membership. **Action** TK to write to PH and GT regarding membership renewal. **Post-meeting note – GT** asked to renew his membership 13 July 2023.

Persistent non-attendance – the Chair outlined a draft policy for dealing with members who consistently fail to attend. The Chair asked for the LAF's approval to write to consistent non-attenders who do not provide apologies. **Action** TK agreed to draft a short policy describing the general approach for members who fail to attend for three meetings in a row without apologies. **MR** mentioned that there was a similar policy in place for County Councillors. He also asked if it would be permissible to offer a substitute County Council representative when necessary.

Active Travel Stakeholder Working Group – **MR** outlined the structure, aims and remit of the working group. **JC** and **LB** agreed to act as liaison between the LAF and the working group. **Action** TK to add a regular item to the agenda covering feedback from the working group.

AONB Malvern Hills Policy and Guidance Documents Consultation. **Action** Chair to draft and circulate a response to members.

11. Date of Next Meeting

Dates on a Wednesday in late January/early February 2024 will be circulated. Meeting closed at 12:27 p.m.