

Item 11.A

National Forest Access & Recreation Group

I reported to the group on our activities over the last six months, mentioning District and Local Plans and the many major development proposals we had advised on. I also explained that as farm tenancies on County Council land become due for renewal the Forum is advising on possible creation of new rights of way and that we were carrying out a detailed review of all open access land in the county.

I advised of our detailed submission into the consultation on the new East Midlands Freight Interchange by the airport.

This year they are concentrating on promoting the use of and visits to the Forest and there are only three new schemes. Of these the only big one is near Burton on Trent and is about 120 acres but as that is in Staffs it is not within our area.

They have a new CEO taking over in Jan and they have poached John Everett from Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust. This may mean a change of emphasis for wildlife considerations but is being balanced by the fact that they are recruiting somebody for a post promoting sport and activity within the Forest.

There is a complete set of guides to the new National Forest Way on a new dedicated web site - www.nationalforestway.co.uk

John Law gave them a presentation on the Access for all project which was enthusiastically received and highly complimented.

Roy Denney

Leicestershire Parks, Open Spaces & Countryside Network

The meeting on 11 December was my first attendance at this Network which seems to consist of officers from the City, Districts and County. Although previously meeting 3 or 4 times a year, it has not met since Jan 2014 due to the many staff changes in authorities and agreed to meet twice p.a. in future. It is now chaired by Samantha Village (of Stepping Stones).

There were representatives from Melton, Harborough, Oadby & Wigston as well as the City and County. LLAF was the only 'outside' body present. I introduced myself as the LLAF rep, 'chair' of its Verges Group and also chair of LRBA. I don't think some of them had thought much about verges before!

The main, illustrated, presentation was from Penny Brown of City Parks about their *Britain in Bloom* and its not so competitive sibling *It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN)*. Penny is still able to spend about half her time on these, particularly on encouraging and supporting IYN groups, the number of which is growing by about 5 a year, currently c.30. These also need support with organisational matters e.g. constitutions, bank a/cs, that are common to many voluntary groups. Obviously the schemes are very successful with good *Bloom* awards and significant community involvement in IYN.

In the discussion about sharing training and courses (for staff & volunteers), alongside hedge laying, basic map reading, safe use of tools, pruning etc, the Oadby ranger said in March 2015 they were having an *Access for All* training course provided by John Law's group via Lincs Co Council at a cost of £30-£50 per person. It was agreed that the Stepping Stones website would be the vehicle for publicising any courses on offer.

In the round table update, apart from frequent mention of recent and upcoming budget cuts, it was clear that authorities took different views on *Bloom* etc participation and that probably the City benefitted from being a large unitary authority. Several seem to be stepping back both physically and financially. One officer talked of 'too many boxes' to be ticked in relation to informal activities by groups, including the need for £10M Public Liability insurance which means the group must have a formal structure. It was suggested Voluntary Action Leics could help. The need for groups to involve the highest possible *political* level was emphasised. Oadby/Wigston has a baling machine for cutting some verges and park areas in August in partnership with a farmer, which could be hired out. City Parks is starting a review in January. Harborough(?) is to review its Walking & Cycling Strategy.

Next meeting will probably be on 25 June 2015 looking at the re-greening of the Welland in/near Mkt Harborough followed by a brief meeting.

Vicky Allen

Canals and Waterways

The only thing to report from the Canals & Waterways Trust is a safety campaign reflecting the increase in deaths during festive seasons. Overall, deaths are decreasing on our waterways but towpaths, bridges and lock-sides can become slippery at this time of year and snow can conceal boat mooring rings and ropes which, unless people are paying attention, can be easy to trip over. Frozen canals look beautiful but no-one should ever attempt to walk on or test the thickness of the ice. Each year around 400 people drown in the UK, according to the Royal Life Saving Society UK, with children and young adults and people under the influence of alcohol among the highest risk groups. Statistics reveal that young people, especially men, are most likely to have an accident, usually after a night on the tiles.

The Trust have now finished the dredging of the Grantham Canal.

Nothing particularly LLAF-specific from River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership from the October meeting, and the minutes haven't been circulated yet. Next meeting is on 21 January

Herbert Eppel

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