



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH 2010, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.05 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.45 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr J Elfes, in the Chair

Mr D Briggs, Mr C Hurworth, Mrs V Lynch, Mrs B Jennings and Mr J Coombe

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr M Walker, Mr J Clark, Mr L Stevens, Ms S Burchell and Ms J Taylor

GUESTS PRESENT

Mr P Harris

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Mr J M Elfes be elected Chairman for the ensuing year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Mr D Briggs be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Gavin Caspersz, Peter Challis and Alan Lambourne.

Members were advised that Ed Tampkin had resigned as a Member for disabled access as he had moved to Wales. The Chairman asked the Forum to pass on its gratitude to Ed for all the significant work he undertook. The Forum was advised that Gavin Caspersz, who had been recommended by Annette Weiss from the Chilterns

AONB, had been offered membership of the Forum representing to represent disabled users.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2009 TO BE CONFIRMED

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2009 were confirmed.

6. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

7. HADDENHAM TO THAME CYCLE ROUTE

Lee Stevens, Transport for Buckinghamshire, Cycling Team Leader attended the meeting to outline proposals for a cycle route between Haddenham and Thame.

The Officer advised that in July 2008 Buckinghamshire County Council commissioned a feasibility study to look at options into the provision of a community path for cyclists, pedestrians and horseriders between Haddenham and Thame. Three possible route options were subsequently identified.

Members were informed that the County Council also received a petition in favour of a route being developed with approximately 1500 signatures and that the Cabinet Member for Transport agreed that determination of a preferred route be explored further. Of the original three suggested routes one route has not been progressed further. The two remaining options are:

1. via Scotsgrove Mill
2. via Tythrop

Informal consultation on the remaining route options has been undertaken and residents are now being asked to indicate their preference through a formal public consultation. The Officer showed Members how to access the consultation on the County Council website and talked Members through the individual routes. Members were informed that the consultation was temporarily suspended as amendments following a public meeting were being made but that this would be back on-line shortly. The Officer invited comments from the Local Access Forum on the routes.

Members enquired about the response to date and were advised that landowners had expressed concerns regarding issues over flooding and livestock. There had been much public support for a connection between the two towns and it was for this reason that this was being explored.

A Member asked what cyclists thought of the route options. In response the Officer said that feedback had suggested that the route options would be more appealing to cyclists currently put-off by the busy traffic on the A418. However due to cost factors there is no plan to upgrade the surface of the route. Members commented that the fact that the surface was not going to be immediately upgraded, should not be a reason not to proceed and highlighted that over time grants for this purpose may be available.

The LAF endorsed the project in principle.

8. PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT SERVICE - TRANSFORMATION

As part of the Council's 'Transformation' programme, the Planning, Environment and Development Service restructured its management posts. There is no longer a Rights of Way Group and the former post of 'Rights of Way and Access Group Manager' has been deleted and is encompassed within a wider remit of 'Environment Group Manager'. Mike Walker has been appointed to this post which encompasses Rights of Way, Natural Environment, Historic Environment (Archaeology), Gypsy & Traveller Services, Sustainability and Country Parks.

The Strategic Access Team Leader and Assistant posts have been deleted. Jonathan Clark's role as Strategic Access Officer will now fall within the Natural Environment Team, headed by Mark Bailey. Fiona Broadbent will continue to run the 'Simply Walk' initiative but within Sue Burchell's Definitive Map Team. Sue will be reducing her hours to work 3 days per week from April. The Maintenance & Enforcement Team remains the same but will now be called the Rights of Way Operations Team. The post of Maintenance and Enforcement Team Leader remains, albeit retitled as Rights of Way Operations Team leader, but the contracts of two temporary posts terminate this month and will not be renewed.

In February 2010 the Council determined that the budget available to the Rights of Way Service would be reduced by £68,000. A three year, £100,000 capital investment programme also comes to an end this month. It was commented that other Counties were also restructuring as savings needed to be made.

The Chairman commented that he was pleased that Mike Walker had been appointed as Environment Group Manager and was responsible for Rights of Way.

A Member expressed concern that the budget cuts would permanently damage the footpaths and bridleways in Buckinghamshire. John Coombe, Chiltern Society raised concerns about the way some maintenance work was allocated. In response it was highlighted that the Council must adhere to strict health and safety procedures and that when an order was raised, it was necessary to carry out a risk assessment. It was also highlighted that the Council's contractors are now not able to commence works unless they have first checked with all statutory agencies that there are no utilities present. This limited the potential for further works to be undertaken by volunteers.

The Officers were asked which Cabinet Member was responsible for the Service. In response the Forum was advised that Mark Bailey's team reported to two different Cabinet Members and Mike Walkers team reported to three.

9. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

1. Definitive Map Update

Rights of Way Applications

Following the public inquiry into an Order to upgrade Public Bridleways Nos. 40 and 40A Great and Little Kimble and No. 62 Ellesborough to Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT), the Secretary of State's decision is awaited.

A reply from the Secretary of State about the direction to make Orders upgrading to BOAT status routes at Little Missenden and Stowe/Lillingstone Dayrell is still awaited. Officers wrote to DEFRA as it was considered that the applications were not duly made, asking that the decisions be reassessed with this in mind.

The outcome of the Trail Riders' Fellowship appeals against the County Council's rejection of applications for BOATs in Great Missenden is still awaited.

Orders have been made for public footpaths in Amersham and Ellesborough and objections have been received.

Applications for a claimed footpath in Shabbington and a claimed bridleway in Great and Little Hampden have been rejected and the applicants have appealed against these decisions. Officers are in correspondence with DEFRA regarding this issue.

The application for a claimed bridleway in High Wycombe has been agreed and an order will be made.

Village Green Applications

Village greens have been registered at: Burton's Wood, Little Chalfont; Windmill Hill, Princes Risborough; Candlemas Lane, Beaconsfield (landowner voluntary registration).

The following village green applications are in progress – Amersham; Daly Way, Aylesbury; Bloomfield Cottages, Pinewood Fields, Iver Heath; Station Road, Marsh Gibbon; and Coppice Farm Road, Tylers Green.

Barn Meadow and Bellingdon were rejected as they did not meet the criteria required.

New paths and achievements

The problems with Ickford Public Footpath No. 12 have finally been resolved by diversion of the route after 30 years. The Parish Council put in an application to divert the route into fields at the back of houses and the recreation ground. The Inspector confirmed the route.

A new network of bridleway at Denham Golf Club has been added to the Definitive Map and two new public footpaths have been added to the map in Wexham and Lillingstone Lovell.

Viv Lynch requested a copy of the Definitive Map and advised she would publicise the new bridleway.

Action: Officer

A Member enquired when the new Rights of Way would appear on Ordnance Survey Maps and it was advised that this was likely to be on the next revision, although it was not known when the OS might undertake this.

Following negotiations regarding the diversion of Taplow 21 away from a house, it became possible to create a new route for the Beeches Way onto a more attractive route through woodland.

A Member enquired about the status of Beaconsfield 4 and Hughenden 54. The Officer advised that Beaconsfield 4 is in progress and there is a query currently with

the applicants. In relation to Hughenden 54, the school applied to extinguish the route on the grounds of school safety. However, the Secretary of State said it was not a valid order as a reasonable alternative route should have been made. This order has been remade. The objection period is due to end shortly and it will then be sent to the Secretary of State.

A proposed bridleway dedication by Watermead Parish Council will create a new link between the Weedon Hill development and the Watermead estate. It forms part of the Council's vision to have a circular bridleway all around Aylesbury. The Eastern Arc proposals may present an additional opportunity for a link between Weedon Hill and Berton.

2.Maintenance Update

Positive responses have been received from Parish Councils towards the 'Walk Your Local Paths' initiative. To date 30 parishes have responded positively and requested survey forms.

The rights of way best value performance indicators (BVPI 178) is no longer a government requirement, but the Council continues to survey twice a year to benchmark our performance against other authorities. Results for Buckinghamshire are the best ever this year and, based on a 5% survey of the network, results indicated:

86.5% of the network was found to be 'easy to use' and 98% of structures on those routes were 'easy to use'.

There are currently fewer than 1000 outstanding 'issues' awaiting action on the Council's database which Officers are working to reduce. However, this compares favourably with the figure two years ago when the number of issues outstanding was 2800.

Structures

250 structures have been improved to aid mobility access, including 47 gates installed this year through the 'donate a gate' scheme.

Surfacing

Over half a kilometre of public paths have been surfaced and repaired.

Partnership Working

Path maintenance continues through the Chiltern Society Path Maintenance Volunteers and over 900 volunteer hours carried out on path surveys by the Ramblers' Association.

Planning Applications

Over 170 planning applications assessed by officers - comments provided to District Councils where appropriate.

Transport for Buckinghamshire

From 1 April 2009 the County Council appointed a new Highways Contractor, Ringway-Jacobs and a new alliance called Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) was formed. The Rights of Way Group is not part of TfB, but does draw services from this organisation through the daily works teams and for surfacing jobs. Within the first few months of the contract there was a reduction in output. In the clearance season, May to September 2009, there appeared to be 12% fewer tasks carried out compared to the same period in 2008. Officers will be working with TfB to improve output and reduce the cost of the gangs they are providing.

A Member enquired what the annual spend with Ringway Jacobs was and was

advised that this was between £200k-£300k. The Officer informed the Forum that the Rights of Way Group had £300k available to spend and additional capital on top. However, the budget will be reduced next year to £250k and the Group will lose the additional capital budget.

Officers were asked if the Council would still be able to match fund the 'donate-a-gate' scheme. An Officer said that whilst the scheme had been successful and was highly valued by the Council, the reduction in next year's budget would mean that this may have to be reviewed.

3.Strategic Access Update

a.Creating new links

The Forum was shown pictures and maps of a number of the following routes to facilitate discussions.

Consultation is ongoing regarding Lacey Green Bridleway 30, with a view to using s.26 Highways Act 1980 to undertake a compulsory creation of a greater width for this route as it is currently only around 1.5m wide. After negotiations, the landowner refused to move fencing to provide a usable width for horse riders. The proposal for a compulsory creation has support from local riders and Lacey Green Parish Council.

Officers have again met with Paul Newman Homes regarding a pending planning application on land at Valley Farm, Soulbury to be submitted in late March 2010 to Aylesbury Vale District Council. Agreement is concluding to provide all the new access Officers requested. Should the planning application be approved by AVDC it will create new links as part of the Leighton Buzzard Green Wheel with 'spokes' out to Milton Keynes and potentially into Wing.

Following discussions with The National Grid's Land & Development Team regarding dedication of a short section of bridleway on its land near Caps Wood, Denham, it has indicated that it is not prepared to do so. Although the land is owned by National Grid, it is answerable to shareholders and no employee or director is able to give third party rights over the land. The Council is considering making an order under s.26 Highways Act 1980 to compulsorily create the route.

Discussions with the Great Hampden Estate, initiated by The Council and Naphill Riding Club are on-going. The Estate is happy to allow permissive horse riding on selected routes to complement the existing Rights of Way network for walkers and horse riders, but wish to omit permission for cyclists. Viv Lynch said that she would be happy to help with any publicity.

Officers are investigating a possible extension to the Lord Parmoor permissive path into Lane End village to create a new connection from the village into Moor Wood and the surrounding path network.

b. Strategic developments

After negotiation between officers and the consultants for Chiltern Railways, five diversion applications have been submitted to close 'at-grade' crossings as part of the 'Evergreen 3' project proposals, which aim to increase line speeds between London and Birmingham. As a result of negotiations three new bridges are proposed at the Gerrards Cross, Chepping Wycombe and West Wycombe.

High Speed Rail (HS2) is to be discussed in greater detail at the July 2010 meeting. Members were advised that Buckinghamshire County Council's Strategic Planning Team has been asked to provide a briefing on landscape, environment and heritage impacts (including rights of way and access) to the EiP (Examination in Public)

Inspector, who is currently making a judgement on AVDC's Core Strategy. The briefing will inform the inspector whether HS2 has a material impact on the Aylesbury Growth Arc options. The Chairman highlighted that the Ramblers Association had identified the Rights of Way affected.

c. Open Access

A successful Access Management Grant scheme application to Natural England was submitted by The Chilterns' Conservation Board to install 6 new interpretation boards on Naphill Common.

d. Simply Walk

Simply Walk currently has 49 walks throughout Buckinghamshire, attracting over 500 walkers each week. The walks are led by trained volunteers and are free.

Fiona Broadbent has now trained 3 PCSO's as walk leaders in Marlow and hopes to spread the same idea into other areas.

e. Donate-a-gate

There have been 16 new donors since the last meeting taking the total to 168.

f. Parish newsletter

The third edition of the Parish Council newsletter became available online at the beginning of March. Alan Lambourne, on behalf of Westcott Parish Council, and Richard Skym, on behalf of Waddesden Parish Council, have offered to write articles for the May 2010 edition of the Parish Newsletter on their 'Walk your Local Paths' events.

A Member enquired about the process for 'stopping-up' a road. In response an Officer said that this is dealt with by the Magistrates Courts and that certain rights may be retained. It was highlighted that the Transportation Service lead on this area and that the Parish Council must agree to any proposed changes.

Action: An Officer agreed to look into the specific circumstances in Latimer in more detail.

10. LAF MEMBERS' REPORT

1. Membership

Gavin Caspersz has agreed to represent disabled users, replacing Ed Tamkin who has resigned. At the July 2010 meeting Gavin will give a short introduction to his background in accessing the countryside on a mobility vehicle.

David Briggs, Alan Lambourne, Richard Pushman and Brenda Jennings have agreed to continue to be members of the Forum.

Members NOTED the information

2. Sustrans update

Negotiations are underway with the landowner of the Bourne End to Wooburn Green disused railway line with a view to purchasing a section to create a cycling link.

Volunteers have surveyed National Route 50 with a view to signing this section from Winslow to Aylesbury.

Members NOTED the information

3. Slough LAF correspondence

Members discussed the correspondence received from Slough LAF. In response an

Officer offered to draw up a list of priority routes for consideration and the Chairman agreed to respond to the letter dated 17 November 2009.

Action: Chairman/Officer

4. South East LAF members meetings

John Elfes advised that the main business discussed at the meeting was the Forestry Commission's proposal to charge for horse riding in its woods. A working group has been set up and Viv Lynch was nominated to sit on this group. The Chairman highlighted that Viv is also Chairman of Milton Keynes LAF and should have received an invite to this meeting.

Viv Lynch advised that due to the distance of the meetings she will continue to be involved with the working group electronically. At the last meeting it was proposed that each LAF look at one forest within their area and to complete a survey on the usage. Viv will be undertaking this survey and obtaining feedback from users at Wendover Woods. She highlighted that presently the British Horse Society (BHS) are busy responding to High Speed 2 (HS2)

Members NOTED the information and agreed that the Forestry Commission proposal and HS2 be discussed at the next meeting of the LAF

5. Conference for LAF members

John Coombe and Viv Lynch updated Members on the meeting held on 16th March 2010 in central London. Viv Lynch commented that the meeting highlighted that LAFs should be consulted regarding major developments which did not appear to be happening and that LAFs are not statutory bodies but statutory advisory bodies. Members attending the meeting discussed a proposal to recommend to Natural England changing the status of LAFs to a statutory body.

An Officer advised that in principle LAFs should be considering major developments and that the LAF would have the opportunity to comment on the proposed HS2 route options. The Officer highlighted that due to tight timeframes for consultations it is not always possible to discuss at a LAF meeting.

Members NOTED the information

6. LAF Annual Review

Members considered articles for this year's annual review. The Chairman agreed to provide a report and invited Members to contribute. David Briggs Viv Lynch agreed to provide articles. John Coombe and Chris Hurworth said they would also try to provide an article. The Officer asked if articles could be forwarded to him by 23 April 2010.

Members agreed a way forward

7 Chiltern District Council toilet closures

A Member advised that Chiltern District Council proposes to close the toilets they manage unless parish councils are willing to take them over. The Member raised concern that this could reduce accessibility for some users in the countryside. John Coombe agreed to draft a letter to Chiltern District Council and the Chairman agreed to sign the letter on behalf of the LAF.

Action: John Coombe

8. Chesham 'Walkers are Welcome' initiative

In March 2010 the Chesham Environment Group achieved 'Walkers are Welcome' accreditation for Chesham. (Details of the scheme can be found in the December 2009 minutes.)

Members NOTED the information

9. Countryside 2010 - 29th May to 13th June 2010

'COUNTRYSIDE 2010' is a campaign funded by the Rural Development Programme for England and supported by SEEDA and Tourism South East. Members were advised that there is an event directory going live in March with details available at www.countryside2010.org.uk.

Members were invited to register events. John Coombe advised that the Chiltern Society is participating and the Chairman agreed to check whether the Ramblers' Association had any suitable events to include in the directory. Members were advised to contact the Officer if they had any events to include.

Members NOTED the information

10. Forestry Commission proposal to charge for horse riding in its woods

A summary of Viv Lynch's comments to the Forestry Commission's proposals were outline in Appendix 2 and a summary of Alan Marlow's meeting with the Forestry Commission outlined in Appendix 3. (See also Item 4). Members agreed to discuss the issue at the July 2010 LAF meeting.

Action: Viv Lynch to undertake a survey of usage in Wendover Woods.

11. Open access survey

The Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Ramblers' Association has undertaken the first half of a survey of open access land in Buckinghamshire. A sample of findings was outlined in Appendix 4. The main issue appeared to be around signing. The Chairman enquired if there were resources to address the signing issue. The Officer informed the Forum that he would like to meet with the Chiltern Society to consider this. The Chairman commented that there may be some ramblers who could help with signage.

Members NOTED the information and the Officer agreed to revive the meeting with the Chiltern Society regarding signage.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Future agenda items were discussed and it was highlighted by an attending Oxfordshire County Council officer, that findings from the Haddenham to Thame Community Path consultation needed to be discussed jointly with Oxfordshire and that the item should be brought back to a future LAF meeting.

An Officer raised the ongoing problems with the public crossing land grazed by cattle and sheep on public rights of ways and showed two draft signs that might be appropriate to fix on gates and stiles. It was agreed to raise as a future agenda item.

Action: Officer add to future agenda

12. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is to be held on Wednesday 7 July 2010, 10am, Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury. The following meeting will be at 10am, on 3 November 2010, also in Mezzanine Room 1.

Chairman