



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 6 JULY 2011, IN COMT BOARD ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.07 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.13 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr J Elfes, in the Chair

Mr D Briggs, Mr N Harris, Mr C Hurworth, Mr A T A Lambourne, Mrs V Lynch, Mr R Pushman, Ms D Bird, Mr J Coombe and Mr Caspersz

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr M Walker, Mr J Clark, Mr S Kidd and Ms J Taylor

GUESTS PRESENT

Mr H Hancock and Ms A Clayton

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence was received from Peter Challis and Helen Beevers.

Glyn Thomas, Community Impact Bucks was welcomed to the Forum.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 09 MARCH 2011 TO BE CONFIRMED

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2011 were confirmed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Mr Briggs enquired if any feedback had been received in relation to his letter regarding the Natural England Countryside Code review. Mr Clark advised that no feedback had been received.

The Chairman enquired if there had been any response regarding Chawley Manor Farm. Mr Clark advised that a meeting had been held with Natural England and the agent for the landowner, on 28th June 2011. The agent had said that he was intending to start up a new shooting syndicate and that the money had been passed over for

commencement this year. Natural England heard the evidence. They will now go away to consider the evidence further and then make a decision. Mr Clark said Natural England were mindful of the 5 representations made stressing the opinion that the restrictions were over stated.

5. LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIPS

Members had received the report of Sandy Kidd, County Archaeologist, Acting Historic and Natural Environment Team Leader on Local Nature Partnerships.

Mr Kidd advised that the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) has been proposed in the Governments Natural Environment White Paper and that LAFs are identified as one of the possible members of an LNP. Mr Kidd advised that discussions were ongoing regarding the possible submission of a bid for a Bucks and Milton Keynes LNP.

Mr Kidd talked Members through the Briefing paper and made the following comments:

- LNPs will work at a high/strategic level
- Members were invited to note the timeline on page 13 of the agenda.
- The aim is to have a LNP covering every part of the Country.
- LAFs have a legal status and the officer suggested the possibility of a LAF representative sitting on the LNP.

The Chairman asked what the LAF could contribute to the LNP. Mr Kidd said that it was currently in the early stages but should the bid for transitional funding be successful a key element would be to define the scope and develop a business plan. Mr Hurworth commented that according to the vision of LNPs listed on page 11 the LAF need to be involved as the points apply to LAFs and LAFs should have an input.

Mr Harris asked if the LAF would be merged into the new partnership or remain separate. Mr Kidd said he would not want to have more groups than present due to the current economic climate.

Mr Lambourne said that the suggested membership includes Parish Councils and asked if they would be contacted individually or through BALC. Mr Kidd advised that the detail is still to be filled out but that they would probably contact the parent organisation.

Mr Briggs asked who would be putting in the application. In response Mr Kidd said that it was likely to be the County Council but on a partnership basis and that he hoped that LAF would be happy to have its name included on the bid.

Following discussion the Chairman confirmed that the LAF would like to be involved.

Mr Kidd said that the terms of the application need to be clarified. He has noted that he has reported to the Forum and that the LAF is happy to be engaged in the consultation process.

6. HS2

Members had received the report of the Strategic Access Officer. Members were asked to consider the Forum's response to the HS2 consultation.

The following comments were made by various Members during discussion:

- The consultation questions are loaded.
- Those involved such as the Council may be in a different position but the Local Access Forum should be neutral. Maybe there is a role for the LAF to highlight areas for mitigation. If the LAF does not take a cautious position it is likely that no-one in Bucks will be able to participate in any constructive mitigation work.
- Should the LAF stick to Rights of Way (RoW) and Access or should it comment on the effect on the network? Even if the LAF sticks to RoW and access should the LAF comment on the actual route?
- There is a question in the consultation whether we agree with High Speed Rail (HSR). What is the Forum's view?
- It is not only the County Council that objects to HS2, there are other counties also opposing. The route should be of concern in terms of the need to cut through the countryside and particularly the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Buckinghamshire, instead of using existing routes.
- The route and project will require considerable funding.
- The response from the LAF should be strong.
- The Chilterns' Conservation Board (CCB) is against the proposed route and the LAF should consider supporting the principle taken by the CCB on the route.
- Connectivity of current lines is more important than building a new route.
- Massive expenditure is required on infrastructure in the UK which will require massive investment.
- The LAF should not be considering the economics of the project. The LAF should restrict comments to issues within its remit.
- The British Horse Society (BHS) is not taking a stance either way on HS2 and the point around working with the engineers regarding future mitigation is important.
- The designers seem to be receptive to suggestions at the moment. They might not be so once the route is approved.
- The LAF does not have to express a view on the route. It can just avoid commenting on that question.
- The point of a consultation is whether a project should proceed or not. The LAF needs to express a view one way or the other. Mitigation comes afterwards should the project be agreed.
- The National Trust does not feel that the business case has been proved and there is also the issue of the various National Trust properties affected on route.
- It is not the Forum's business to say whether high speed rail is good or bad, or if the economic case stacks up. The Forum should be considering the effect of the route on rights of way and access.
- The LAF could mention in its response that, should the route go ahead, it will need extensive discussions and that the LAF would like to influence any decisions at the relevant time.

The LAF took a vote on whether they were opposed to the route or not. There was a majority vote in favour of opposing the route (6-4).

Members then continued the discussion on HS2 and made the following comments:

- HS2 has not provided an environmental impact assessment.

- HS2 has said that it will produce an Environmental Impact Assessment to inform the debate on the Hybrid Bill. It will probably therefore be formalised after the decision in December 2011.
- Any objection from the LAF could be based on the fact that there is no Environmental Impact Assessment.
- It is important that the LAF thinks of a method of working with engineers to communicate information regarding rights of way and access affected and areas for mitigation.
- There is a long way to go in the process and there is time later to discuss the finer detail of mitigation.
- If the LAF objects to the route the response could highlight that the route is directly severing 66 public rights of way in Buckinghamshire alone.

The Chairman agreed that he would draft a response to the consultation and circulate to Members for their comments.

Action: Chairman

7. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

Members had received the Rights of Way Group report.

The Chairman invited questions on the Definitive Map Update.

Mr Hurworth asked where the Village Green was in Bryants Bottom, Great Missenden. Mr Clark said he would email Mr Hurworth the details. The Chairman enquired if there were any rights of way severed by the part of the former railway, Quinton application and Mr Clark advised that there was and that Officers had responded.

Ms Taylor took Members through the Rights of Way Operations Update and provided the following updates:

The new power tools purchased for the contracted Ringway Jacobs work teams have cost approximately £5k against a previous cost of £1500 each month to hire.

The first cut on the annual strimming list was delayed due to equipment failure and will be completed shortly. Second cuts will be carried out as necessary.

The Chairman then invited questions.

Mr Lambourne said that a few years ago Members discussed a Rights of Way Improvement Plan and asked what has happened to it. Mr Clark advised that some of the timelines had slipped due to a variety of factors including a reduction in staffing. Ms Taylor commented that the County Council is still looking to improve access and a capital injection of £100K would help in this regard. The Chairman commented that there is a requirement to have a plan but there is not a requirement for it to be implemented. Mr Walker advised that much of the work carried out by Mr Clark is to protect against development and highlighted that the RoW Team has halved since the plan was agreed. Mr Clark suggested the item be discussed at the next meeting of the LAF.

Action: Mr Clark

Mr Clark then took Members through the Strategic Access developments and provided the following updates:

Mr Steven Adams, the new Cabinet Member for Environment has been invited to the next meeting of the LAF on 2 November 2011.

Mr Clark advised that there had been an increased footfall on 'Simply Walk' and commented that the report says that donations from individual walkers was £865 but this had now increased to £1300.

8. LAF MEMBERS REPORT

Members had received the LAF Members' Report.

The following updates were provided:

England Access Forum

The Chairman invited Members to respond to the letter received from the Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries. The letter contained four points and Members made the following comments:

A virtual Forum

- This is intended to replace the England Access Forum and, as such, there is no longer a direct route to government.

A seat on the Rights of Way Review Committee

- The Chairman of the England Access Forum should have a permanent seat on this Committee.
- The Committee should also have an MP as Chairman
- LAFs are independent bodies and Members commented that they did not want to become an arm of the government. It was highlighted that they are also independent to Local Councils.

Ivinghoe Disabled Access

Mr Caspersz commented that the 14 new disabled accessible gates for mobility scooters at Ivinghoe Beacon were welcome, but the Council should be looking to advertise these walks and access routes more widely. Mr Clark suggested that this could be discussed further at the next meeting of the LAF.

Action: Mr Clark

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no Any Other Business.

10. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is to be held on 2 November 2011, 10am, Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury.

Chairman