



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**WEDNESDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 10.00 AM
MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY**

AGENDA

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Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2011, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.25 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr J Elfes, in the Chair

Mr D Briggs, Mr C Hurworth, Mr A T A Lambourne, Mr R Pushman, Mr J Coombe, Mr Caspersz, Mr G Thomas and Mr S Adams

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr M Walker, Mr J Clark, Mr A McVeigh, Ms H Beevers and Ms J Taylor

GUESTS PRESENT

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Neil Harris.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 06 JULY 2011 TO BE CONFIRMED

Minutes of the Meeting held on 06 July 2011 were confirmed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Mr Briggs enquired if there had been any feedback received regarding the Natural England Countryside Code review. Mr Clark advised that no feedback had been received.

5. A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Steve Adams, Cabinet Member for Environment was welcomed to the meeting.

Mr Adams thanked Members for inviting him to the meeting and said that he was appointed Cabinet Member for Environment in June 2011 by the new Leader, Mr Tett.

Mr Adams said that there was a number of changes across the Council with a variety of ongoing projects such as transformation and the place service. He commented that it was a busy time and that he had been talking to Officers regarding the stresses. Mr Adams commented that lessons had been learnt from other portfolios.

Mr Adams advised Members of his background and said he had lived in the Chilterns for all of his life and that he was from a farming family.

He explained that he would be approaching his role by looking at the ways services are currently operating to see if there is a way of doing these better and also be looking at Local Enterprise Partnerships and Parish Partnerships.

Mr Adams invited Members to ask any questions, comments or provide a steer into what they feel he should be looking at.

Mr Thomas referred to agenda item 9, point 17 and said that there appeared to be little joined up thinking. He referred to the proposed bridleway and the bridge at Watermead and said that monies were available which could not be used. Mr Thomas highlighted that there appeared to be a lack of consistency with decisions and that the outcome was dependant on who was making the decision. Mr Adams said that he would look at the consistency of decision making.

Action: Mr Adams

Mr Elfes said that members of the forum had watched cuts affect the areas which they are interested in and asked how far these cuts will go. He enquired if Mr Adams had found any areas where the Council could change or improve the way they were currently done. Mr Adams said the reality within the current economic climate is that on the frontline it will mean doing less or looking for ways to pay less. The options are to work with other big partners which have spending power to drive down prices or recruit more people on a voluntary basis. He said that the County Council would like to do both of these. Other options are continually being explored as the Council will not have the same amount of money to spend as previously. Mr Adams said that he was in fact meeting with the Environment Officer from the Local Government Association that afternoon to discuss good practice. Ultimately however he said it will be a combination of goodwill and a can do attitude.

Mr Briggs suggested that landowners be involved more and provided an example of Council contractors being used to fix latches on farm gates. Ms Taylor said that the Council is looking at moving responsibilities back to landowners.

Mr Lambourne suggested that some Parish Councils could carry out some minor works. Mr Adams said that the Localism Act provides a general power of competence to Parish Councils.

The Chairman thanked Mr Adams for attending.

6. LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIPS; A SUCCESSFUL BID

Andy McVeigh, Ecologist, Natural & Historic Environment Team attended the meeting to discuss the proposed establishment of Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) following publication of the Government's Natural Environment White Paper.

He advised that the bid to Defra for capacity building funds to support the creation of a new Partnership for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes had been successful and that the next step was the development stage. The Forum was advised that the development stage would go into 2012 and said that the new partnership was looking to engage with other sectors including business and health.

Members were informed that there will be two strategic level workshops arranged and that the LAF would be invited to attend.

Mr McVeigh said that during the development stage a strategic vision of the direction of travel of the LNP needs to be formulated, as will an action plan and business plan. It was highlighted that LNPs will need to be self sustaining.

Mr Briggs enquired whether any other sources of funding had been sought. Mr McVeigh advised that funding had been received previously from the Local Authorities (LA) and Natural England. He commented that Natural England may also be able to provide funding for future projects. He said that existing partnerships with the LA are being looked at and that an approach to the Heritage Lottery may be considered.

The Officer was thanked for his update.

7. CHILTERN CONVERSATION BOARD : ACCESS PROJECTS

Annette Venters, Chilterns Conversation Board was welcomed to the meeting.

The Officer gave an update on recent access projects within the AONB.

The key points were as follows:

Chiltern Cycleway

Chiltern Cycleway opened approximately 18 months ago. The Chilterns Cycleway is a 173 mile circular cycle route through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is mainly a leisure cycle route and just over half of the route is in Buckinghamshire.

£50k was received from LEADER funding for the route and a survey was carried out to see if the route had generated income locally e.g. for Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Members were informed that a guidebook for the route has been produced which includes information on pubs, cafes and attractions along the route.

Ms Venters said that signage along the route was highlighted as an issue and that 650 signs across 4 authorities have been installed. She said that this was an area which needs improving and the Board is looking to improve the signage at heritage areas although the original aim of the project was to have minimal signs. Members were informed that there are 12 ranger volunteers who cycle the route 4 times a year and carry out basic signage repairs.

Feedback from the survey carried out to see whether the Chilterns Cycleway had generated income locally was based on a sample of 52. It was highlighted that feedback forms are included in the guidebooks. The feedback highlighted the following:

- The average stay was 2.3 nights
- The Average spend was £74
- The spend varied from £18-£177pp
- The group sizes varied from 1-17, with most being 3-4
- 24 Accommodation providers say they received cycleway visitors
- There is a high level of satisfaction and poor signage and traffic remains the main issues

Members were informed that it is an ongoing survey and hopefully there will be a bigger sample soon.

Access for All

- Work is ongoing with partners towards developing new routes and still free walks.
- There is a possibility of access improvements at Hodgemoor Woods. Bucks County Council, Disabled Ramblers and the Forestry Commission are involved in this.
- There is an access audit at Penn Wood being carried out for the Woodland Trust.
- The Chilterns AONB website is undergoing a major revamp and there is an improved interactive map.

Chilterns AONB State of Environment Report

There is a section of Understanding and Enjoyment which has 3 indicators:

- Participation in Health Walks
- Area of land with statutory or Voluntary Open Access
- Visitor Satisfaction on rights of way and use of the countryside.

The key findings were:

- There has been a 20% increase in health walk attendance over the previous year.
- 94% of visitors to Bucks County Council owned parks and greenspaces are satisfied with their visitor experience.

Emerging Issues, challenges and Priorities

- Impact of HS2
- Local Authority funding cuts
- Bucks County Council service re-organisation
- Future management of the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails

Mr Hurworth enquired if the Chilterns Cycleway route had been promoted to schools and the Officer advised that the Chilterns AONB had been careful not to promote the route as family friendly routes due to the number of hills and traffic issues.

The Officer was thanked for the update.

8. PROPOSED LONG DISTANCE PATH AROUND AYLESBURY

Roy Johnson, Aylesbury and District Ramblers was welcomed to the meeting.

Mr Johnson advised that he had developed proposals for a new long distance path creating a new promoted route around Aylesbury. It was highlighted that there are currently two routes around the town: the Aylesbury Ring, which is a long distance path, and the Round Aylesbury walk which is much shorter.

Mr Johnson explained that his proposal was for a longer path than the Aylesbury Ring. The route would be about 50-55 miles long, mostly in Buckinghamshire, extending west of Waddesdon and east of Wendover, all on Public Rights of Way and, in part, using some existing long distance paths.

Mr Johnson then gave a brief presentation on the proposed route. The key following points were:

Background

- Mid 2011 the Aylesbury Ring was surveyed

- It was noted that there was another route to be established outside the ring using the higher ground

Objectives

To create a new route that:

- Visits or holds the high or higher ground outside the Aylesbury Ring
- Showcase the best of the countryside

Key points of proposal:

- Identify a circular route of 50-55 miles
- Keep it outside existing Ring
- Keep it mostly in Buckinghamshire
- Limited to the west of Waddesdon and east of Wendover
- Keep to public Rights of Way or areas where access is pretty much guaranteed rather than permissive routes

Progress so far:

- Route has been identified
- Route being documented for checking
- Series of circular walks being developed
- Starting discussion with other interested parties

Where next:

- Continue to develop circular walks
- Get support from Ramblers Group to test the route and circular walks to refine them as necessary.
- Set up route on website for members to use and comment on
- Agree how route should be way marked and launched
- Consider adding a northern loop to take the route into the north of county.

Mr Pushman enquired if there was a map available. Mr Johnson advised that a map has not been developed yet and that the first question which needs to be addressed is whether the County Council will adopt the route as maintenance will be necessary.

Mr Coombe asked what the target date for launching the route was and Mr Johnson advised that there was not a launch date as yet as support for the route was required first.

Ms Taylor commented that there are currently 2 walks around Aylesbury and that the difficulty for the Council is that there is a high percentage of routes in Buckinghamshire which are promoted and therefore require greater maintenance. This is an increasing pressure on the service. She said that the aim was that all routes be surveyed once every 2 years but that this timeframe had started to slip and said that volunteers are required to help. In relation to the new proposed route Ms Taylor said that if there were any issues which needed to be addressed, this would take officer time and therefore have a cost implication.

Mr Walker said that in principle there was no reason why the Council wouldn't support the route and said that the route could be integrated and promoted with other routes. He also suggested that Parish Councils could be contacted and asked to promote the route off the back of the circular walks.

The Chairman highlighted that there may be practical difficulties and suggested Mr Johnson continue progressing the route and to keep in touch with officers.

The Chairman thanked Mr Johnson for attending.

9. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

Members had received the Rights of Way Group report.

Ms Beevers took Members through the Rights of Way Applications and provided the following updates:

- The public inquiry on 8 November will be held at Flackwell Heath Community Centre.
- The appeal against the decision regarding the application for extinguishment in Whitchurch has been dismissed.
- A village green application in Gerrards Cross will be advertised shortly.

Ms Taylor then took Members through the Rights of Way Operations Update.

The Chairman invited questions.

Mr Coombe enquired what the volunteer hours were meant to show and commented that the Chiltern Society had reported back a figure of 1200hours. Ms Taylor advised that the number of volunteer hours is recorded so that a cost for this time can be assessed to evidence how much money has been saved through the use of volunteers. She said that she is only able to report back on the figures and information which has been provided.

Mr Coombe asked for a definition of a 'village green' and Mr Clark agreed to discuss with Mr Coombe outside the meeting.

Action: Mr Coombe/Mr Clark

The fencing along Footpath No. 59 in Chepping Wycombe may encroach the footpath and the Parish Council have asked the County Council to pursue this.

Mr Pushman enquired about the Kimble Farm diversion. He said that he was aware that there had been an objection and said that if the County Council were concerned about the costs of a public inquiry the applicant would be willing to cover costs. Mr Walker said that there had been 5 objections, one of which was the Parish Council and commented that it was unusual for the County Council to agree to move a path if the Parish Council objected. Mr Walker said that the County Council did not have to make diversion orders. In relation to the issue of an application paying for a public inquiry Mr Walker said that in theory there was nothing wrong with the applicant covering the costs. Mr Hurworth commented that it concerned him that people buy properties aware of Rights of Way and that then after a period of time they want the path diverted.

Mr Clark took Members through the Strategic Access Update and the following updates were provided:

- Mr Walker advised that due to the proposed merger between the Transportation and Planning and Environment Services it is a delicate time for staff. He commented that there are opportunities which could be derived by Rights of Way working closely with Transport.

Mr Thomas advised in relation to point 17 that Watermead Parish Council had applied for landfill tax monies for the proposed bridge in Watermead but had been advised that the application was not likely to be successful.

Mr Elfes enquired if the County Council was still providing match funding for Donate-

a-gate. Mr Clark said that this was being done informally whilst funds were available.

10. LAF MEMBERS REPORT

Members had received the LAF Members' Report.

The following updates were provided:

The Chairman asked that anyone who wished to be a Huddle Champion should contact Jon Clark.

Action: Members

The Chairman said that he was happy to complete Natural England Annual Report and circulate to LAF Members for comment.

Action: John Elfes

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Walker said that with changes to services and efficiency savings required there is a question regarding how the level of maintenance of Rights of Ways will be sustained and said that it would be good if the Local Access Forum could lead on this process. He said that this could consider involving landowners more or explore ways of working with Parish Councils etc. He said that Officers would be happy to be involved but that it had to be a 'bottom up' process.

Mr Pushman suggested that there could be greater involvement with the Local Area Forums/ Local Community Partnerships or Bucks Association of Local Councils.

12. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is to be held on 29 February 2012, 10am, Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury

Chairman



**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Report

Date: 29th February 2012
Title: Service restructure
Author: Jonathan Clark
Contact Officer: Katy MacDonald (01296 383604)

1. The Planning Environment & Development Service has merged with the Transportation Service to form the new 'Place Service'. One of the reasons for the reorganisation is to meet the major budget challenge faced by the County Council. The Rights of Way Service has been affected.
2. Area Officers within the Operations Team have been reduced from four to three and are now managed within the Transportation Alliance with Ringway-Jacobs, Transport for Buckinghamshire.
3. Interviews for 3 Definitive Map Team posts are currently being undertaken and, along with the Strategic Access Officer, now sit within a new Planning, Advisory and Compliance Team.
4. 'Simply Walks' work moves into a Sustainability Team.

Recommendation: Members to consider comments.



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Report

Date: 29th February 2012

Title: Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 – Chawley Manor Farm Access Restriction Renewal

Author: Jonathan Clark

Contact Officer: Katy MacDonald (01296 383604)

1. Natural England is consulting on a review of the restrictions on land at Chawley Manor Farm, Bottom Road, West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP14 4BS. This is one of the largest pieces of chalk grassland open access land in the county and for the last six years has been subject to access restrictions between July and February to reduce disturbance to game birds.
2. The Forum was consulted about this at the 7th March 2011 meeting and the response is attached in Appendix 1. However, Natural England realised in October 2011 that this case actually runs to February 2012 and not 2011 as was stated in the initial consultation document (NE routinely gives directions for 6 years to be reviewed within 5 years).
3. The Forum will be aware that there is a fenced-off path for pedestrians along the northern boundary providing access all year. The site has been covered by two restriction cases: 2006070033 - a restriction originally for land management, for prevention of disruption to the shoot and disturbance to game restricting *people* to the fenced corridor from 1st July until the 1st February each year; and 2006040177 - for *dogs* to be kept on leads within the fenced corridor to prevent disturbance to game and for public safety due to cows and calves.
4. There are now three proposed restrictions on this site:
 - 2006070033 – outline restriction to prevent disturbance to game on shoot days and the day before a shoot. People restricted to the fenced route for up to 20 days during the shooting season.

The restrictions on dogs are now covered by two cases:

 - 2006040177 – public safety due to cows and calves (live, determined 5th May 2011). Dogs restricted to fenced route 1st May to 1st October;
 - 2012026254 – a new case for land management to prevent disturbance to game during the shooting season. Dogs restricted to fenced route from 2nd October to 1st February (if 2006040177 was revoked due to cessation of cattle grazing

2012026254 would need to be reassessed and extended to cover the pre-shoot season from 15th July).

5. The LAF's views on the current directions are sought to assist in deciding whether the restrictions are still necessary for the original purpose and, if so, whether the extent and nature of the restrictions are still appropriate for the original purpose.
6. Mr. Plumbridge will be present to personally make his case.

Recommendation: Members to discuss and arrange a response



**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Report

Date: 29th February 2012
Title: Dorney Olympics Venue
Author: Corinne Waldron/Jonathan Clark
Contact Officer: Katy MacDonald (01296 383604)

1. In partnership with Peter Challis (Sustrans), the Olympic Delivery Authority and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council, a number of new walking cycling links have been established around the Dorney Rowing Lake to provide a lasting Olympic legacy for communities in this area.
2. There are now off-road walking and cycling connections from Maidenhead and Taplow to Dorney Reach, Eton and Windsor, as well as improved connections to Bray. The Thames Path now has extensive sections surfaced where these previously had eroded, muddy or grassed surfaces.

Recommendation: Members to note



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Report

Date: 29th February 2012

Title: Rights of Way Team Update

Author: Helen Beevers, Joanne Taylor and Jonathan Clark

Contact Officer: Katy MacDonald (01296 383604)

A. Definitive Map Update (Helen Beevers)

Rights of Way Applications

- 1 A public inquiry was held on 8 November 2011 into an Order to add public footpaths at Deangarden Wood, High Wycombe to the Definitive Map. The Order has not been confirmed by the Inspector because he could not be certain that the routes shown on the Order plan were routes actually enjoyed by the public.
- 2 The Order to upgrade Public Bridleways Nos. 40 and 40A Great and Little Kimble and No. 62 Ellesborough to Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) was confirmed by the Inspector with modifications. Objections to the proposed modifications were received; a third public inquiry was held on 5 January 2012. We await the Inspector's decision.
- 3 The Secretary of State directed us to make Orders for BOATs in Stowe/Lillingstone Dayrell, Great Missenden/Wendover and Little Missenden. All the Orders have been made and advertised. Objections to the Orders have been received and the matters are being referred to the Secretary of State.
- 4 The Order to add a Public Footpath between Sheraton Drive and Windsor Drive to the Definitive Map and Statement has been advertised. Objections to the Order have been received. The Order and objections will be determined by the Secretary of State. Orders will soon be advertised in Lacey Green, Chartridge and Taplow.
- 5 Orders to add routes to the Definitive Map and Statement in Marlow, Whitchurch, and Great and Little Hampden have been referred to the Secretary of State. A public inquiry into the Marlow Order will be held on 22 May 2012. The Great and Little Hampden Order will be determined by written representation. We await direction for the Whitchurch Order.
- 6 An application for the extinguishment of a public footpath in Whitchurch was rejected by the Rights of Way Committee and the applicant appealed against the decision. This appeal has been rejected by the Secretary of State.

- 7 Applications for claimed rights of way are currently in progress: claimed footpaths in High Wycombe, Stowe, Aston Clinton, Lower Winchendon, Wendover and Halton, Princes Risborough, Iver, Westbury, Penn and Beaconsfield; claimed bridleways in West Wycombe and Downley; claimed Restricted Byway in Gerrards Cross.
- 8 An application for a Special School Extinguishment Order (Beachborough School, Westbury) has been accepted by the Rights of Way Committee. An Order is in progress.

Village Green Applications

- 9 There are currently seven village green applications in progress – land at Lower Road, Gerrards Cross; land at the Field, Bryants Bottom in Great Missenden; a second application has been received for land at the Fields and the Clump, Iver; land at Hampden Hill, Beaconsfield; land at Coppice Farm Road, Tylers Green, Penn; land at Meadow Close, Wycombe Marsh; and land off Cherwell Road, Bourne End.

B. Rights of Way Operations Update (Joanne Taylor)

- 10 Vegetation Clearance operations continued up to the end of October 2011 with the total amount for clearance amounting to 481 kilometres, exceeding last year's total of 330km. It appears that the extra investment in hiring additional mowing machinery would account for the increase. Hopefully we can replicate a similar arrangement for summer clearance in 2012.
- 11 A summary of the work carried out between 1st April 2011 and the 15th February 2012 is attached to the report in Appendix 3. Whilst the teams were tied up over the summer period on clearance works only urgent structure improvements were carried out, which created a backlog of outstanding structure works and other basic maintenance jobs. It has been possible to employ additional crews to catch up on these jobs and I feel this is reflected in the summary figures.
- 12 Some of the more notable work outputs are the number of road signs repaired or replaced, currently standing at 164 – up from October 2011 by 104 signs - and stiles repaired currently at 215, up from October 2011 by 140. However, the backlog of outstanding work instructions resulted in an increase in the average time taken to complete an instruction, from approx 38 days to 70 days. The number of issues outstanding on the system currently stands at 848.
- 13 Congratulations and thanks should go to members of the Chiltern Society and Ramblers' Association for all their help carrying out the November BVPI 178 survey (Best Value Performance Indicator). LAF Members will recall that the County Council approached these organisations last autumn to help assist in the 2.5% path network survey which is completed in May and November each year. Happily, the new surveyors quickly grasped the methodology, completing and returning the paperwork very promptly. As was hoped, the results were roughly consistent with previous surveys, showing 81% of paths rated 'Easy to Use', 96% of structures in good/adequate condition and 99% of roadside path arms correctly in place.
- 14 However, the survey result also gave us a surprise. Regrettably it appears there was an increase in the number of paths not reinstated/made visible across arable land. This may be the result of an oversight and omission to send out the usual autumn 'Ploughing and Cropping' letter to farmers with arable land. It is usual to

send such a reminder around April and October each year, but unfortunately last October's letter wasn't sent out. Whilst we cannot be absolutely certain that this was entirely the cause of the rise in the number of paths recorded as not reinstated, nevertheless, there was an increase. We recorded only 2 path fails on paths surveyed in spring 2011 (with 92% of arable land reinstated) but 10 path fails in November 2011 (with only 37.5% of arable land reinstated).

- 15 Some of the more significant improvement works for this year have included:
- Byway No. 1 in Longwick-cum-Ilmer: improvements to a 100 metre section next to the Phoenix Trail, originally reported by Peter Challis. Very large potholes were repaired, plantings laid and a new wearing course installed.
 - Footpath No. 10 Soulbury: improvements were made across a marshy area, including new gates and two new board walks.
 - Footpath No. 59 in Chepping Wycombe: improvements have been made to a 50 metre section of the well-used path - a route that Thames Valley Police wished to close using a Gating Order. However, through negotiation and discussion, including a report submitted to the Joint Neighbourhood Action Group, we were successful in persuading the parties concerned that a series of improvements, including a tarmac surface and overgrowth clearance would help reduce anti-social behaviour and negate the need for gates across the route.
 - Haddenham FP17: Footbridge - replacement of 11 metres of deck and handrail.
 - Cheddington FP3 and Pitstone FP1: 300 metre resurfacing works.
 - Great Brickhill Bridleway 9: 200 metres resurfacing works.
 - Great Brickhill FP13: construction of a flight of steps down a near vertical drop.
 - Dorney FP18: Thames Path, near to Olympic Rowing Lake, resurfacing works.

C. Strategic Access Update (Jonathan Clark)

- 16 58 planning applications have been commented upon since 2nd November 2011, distributed between authorities as follows:
- Aylesbury Vale 19
 - Wycombe 20
 - South Bucks 3
 - Chiltern 4
 - Buckinghamshire County 12
- 17 Improvements have been undertaken on the Ridgeway at Steps Hill, Ivinghoe, to improve disabled access across the site. This completes one further section towards the vision to have the whole Ridgeway through Buckinghamshire accessible by mobility scooter.
- 18 Following planning consent for the ARLA Dairy at Aston Clinton, a s.106 legal agreement includes improvements to the surface of the Grand Union Canal towpath between the ARLA site and Aylesbury (Bridge 9 to Lock 15). This will be a £367,630 investment into the ROW network.
- 19 The announcement by Government on Tuesday 10th January 2012 to proceed with the High Speed 2 railway project following last year's consultation has huge

implications for the rights of way network. The impact has already been assessed and mapped internally, illustrating 66 rights of way directly severed by the route. It is hoped the shape of mitigation measures will emerge this year. The County Council's position is unchanged in that it opposes the decision and consideration is being given to a judicial review.

- 20 A meeting between the County Council and Chiltern Society Area Secretaries and Path Maintenance volunteers (PMVs) was held on Thursday 17th November 2011 at The Full Moon, Hawridge Common. The aim of the day was to look back over the last few years to seek further opportunities for BCC staff, Area Secretaries and PMVs to work better together and for BCC to provide feedback to the Chiltern Society on some on-going projects. The meeting discussed the possible increase in geographic range for the PMVs; a review of health and safety practice; feedback from BCC on the Chiltern Way and Donate-a-gate projects; and a review of PMV output for 2011. A new system for ordering timber was proposed and a system for recording the state of stiles in the county compared to the British Standard. The meeting was well-received by all.
- 21 A footpath creation is proposed by Lane End Parish Council through the Lane End Industrial Estate. The path will connect two halves of the village divided physically and socially and will link residents from each part of the village with the shops in their respective areas. The owners of the Industrial Estate Road are likely to object to any creation proposal. The matter was discussed at the Marlow and South West Chilterns Local Area Forum meeting on 27th February 2012, which included County, District and Parish Councillors.
- 22 There have been 9 new 'Donate-a-Gate' donors since the November 2011 Local Access Forum, funding 11 new gates, and taking the total to 232 donors.
- 23 The partnership project with the Chiltern Society to remove all 127 stiles along the Chiltern Way continues, with 14 more stiles having been removed using the donate-a-gate Gift Aid tax rebate from the government. The route now has only 67 stiles through Buckinghamshire; with 10 locations having landowner refusals.
- 24 It is hoped the next edition of the Parish Newsletter will be produced in March 2012. The previous edition is available at this address:
http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/row/parish_news.page?

D. 'Simply Walk' (Fiona Broadbent)

- 25 The new walks programme leaflet (April – September 2012) will shortly be available on the website and gives information on all walks in the county. The full-colour programme is currently funded and produced by Reactivate Bucks:
http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/row/simply_walk.page?
- 26 Additional funding for Simply Walk has been received from walkers' donations, currently standing at over £2,600. Burnham Health Promotion Trust agreed to fund £1000 per annum for the next 3 years. It is hoped and anticipated that all current funding partners will continue at their current levels.
- 27 The emphasis is now on consolidation of current walks rather than developing walks in new areas, bearing in mind that resources are finite and not being increased. However, wherever possible, an option of slower pace or shorter walks is being offered alongside the current walks programme.
- 28 The latest quarterly figures for October, November and December 2011 stand as follows:-

- Total walkers 1,222
- Total new walkers 161
- Total new volunteer leaders trained 5
- Total volunteer walk leaders 181
- Total footfall 6,053

29 These are considered excellent figures considering the hard winter weather and Christmas period.

Recommendation: Members to consider advice, comments, feedback and questions.



**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

Report

Date: 29th February 2012
Title: LAF Members' Report
Author: Jonathan Clark, Strategic Access
Contact Officer: Katy MacDonald (01296 383604)

Twitter & Facebook (Neil Harris)

- 1 The National Trust Rangers in the Chilterns have launched new Twitter and Facebook accounts in order that visitors can communicate more widely with the staff that manage the Trust's countryside sites. Neil will give a demonstration.

Recommendation: Members to suggest ways in which the LAF or Rights of Way Teams might embrace this media.

Disabled Access Work (Gavin Caspersz)

- 2 Following work with Gavin Caspersz, and with the consent and help of Neil Harris, gate improvements and ramps to replace steps across a sunken lane, have been completed. This has provided a choice of disabled accessible circular walks by mobility scooter around the site. In January 2012 Gavin achieved what will hopefully be the first of many more mobility scooter visits through to Bacombe Hill and it is hoped The Ridgeway will soon be mobility scooter accessible between Wendover and Chequers once work has been completed at the entrance to the Bacombe Hill reserve.

Recommendation: Members to note.

Annual Report (John Elfes)

- 3 John Elfes has completed the Forum's Annual Report in the format produced by Natural England (see Appendix 4). It summarises the work and achievements of the LAF up to November 2011. Forums are bound by the statutory regulations to submit annual information to Natural England. This format aims to provide Natural England with a means through which it can measure success and budget for the year ahead.

Recommendation: Members to note

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Local Nature Partnership (Richard Pushman & David Briggs)

- 4 Members attended a Local Nature Partnership workshop at Green Park, Aston Clinton on Friday 27th January 2012, in order to represent access issues in the formulation and shaping of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Local Nature Partnership, following a successful bid to Defra for funds to support the creation of a new LNP.
- 5 The workshop attempted to develop an integrated environmental vision to improve the natural environment at the landscape scale in a collaborative way that reflects wider social and economic benefits. Consultants are pulling together the findings of the workshop before a submission to Government for LNP status in spring 2012.

Recommendation: Members to note

Letter from Richard Benyon MP

6. The Minister has written to the LAF (Appendix 5) regarding four issues that were outlined in April 2011.
 - (i) National Conference
 - (ii) Huddle – the virtual Forum
 - (iii) A memorandum of understanding between LAFs and Defra
 - (iv) A seat on the Rights of Way Review Committee.

Recommendation: Members to note and decide if a response is necessary.

Natural England – Local Support

7. Jenny Hanwell has written to the LAF as she is unable to make today's meeting (Appendix 6). Local support is offered in a number of ways.

Recommendation: Members to note

Paths for Communities

8. Defra has asked Natural England to develop a new grant scheme called 'Paths for Communities', funded through the rural development programme and offering £1m each year for two years, starting in 2012/13 (Appendix 7). The aim is to develop better local countryside path networks that contribute to the rural economy. Applications should be partnerships, so local Authorities alone will not be eligible to apply. Natural England has set up an email address for comments: p4c@naturalengland.org.uk.

Recommendation: Members to suggest possible schemes and partnerships in Buckinghamshire.

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum

Chawley Manor Farm: Open Access response to the Natural England consultation on the renewal of restrictions.

1. The Open Access land at Chawley Manor Farm, Bledlow Ridge, was discussed at the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum meeting held at County Hall on Wednesday 9th March 2011. Members were shown a map of the Open Access land available, a selection of current photos and were briefed on the current restrictions.
2. Members acknowledged that this piece of land was important in being the largest single piece of chalk grassland open access available in the whole county, but that it does not have high public use.
3. Some Members recalled the landowner coming to speak to The Forum when the restrictions were originally being discussed, and at the time, expressing their sympathy and support due to a possible lack of income as a result of the open access.
4. However, the opinion expressed at the meeting on 9th March 2011, was that the restrictions, in particular keeping the public to the fenced-off route between 1st July and 1st February (annually) was too long and the land management reasons overstated. Moreover, it was thought the owner had not met his obligations by leaving the entrances obstructed.
5. A photo was shown to the Forum of this entrance at the commencement of the open access rights after two wooden pedestrian gates had been installed and a photo from 2009 showing both gates having been removed. The first had left a gap onto the fenced-off path, which was fine, but the second had been removed and replaced with a metal field gate tied tightly to the fence with bailer twine and this obstructed the public's ability to access the land.
6. The Forum suggested that an additional entrance should be available from the south west side through a new pedestrian gate at the T-junction between Hatch Lane and Bottom Lane. The field gate at this position currently has barbed wire tied over the top.
7. In addition, it was thought that the land should have better on-site signage, with clip frames provided by Buckinghamshire County Council, at every entrance to the land, showing its extent and restrictions.



What can Huddle do for you?

The User Friendly Network site for Local Access Forums

Direct Contact with the Defra Minister Richard Benyon – the Minister has committed to hosting discussion events through Huddle so you can put your questions directly to him.

Links with other Forums – you can invite specific LAFs to join your discussion or see a whiteboard (this is a notice board where you can post links to interesting articles or information). This means you have a wider network than just your Region. Coastal LAFs can make links, Urban or Upland LAFs can establish their own groups to share similar issues. The possibilities are endless.

Advice - use the Discussion or Whiteboard Tabs to pose questions. Your answer may come from DEFRA, Natural England, a local authority or another LAF. Use the People Tab to find an expert to ask (each person who is registered on Huddle has a 'profile' in which they can let others know their skills and experience).



Collaborative working – use the File Tab to work on a document together, get the support of other LAFs to hone your work. Want to make a joint response with several LAFs then use the File Tab to work together.

Mentoring – need a bit of extra support with a tricky response, ask a LAF who has dealt with a similar issue to support you.

Keep up to date with new advice, guidance, legislation – use the Whiteboard Tab to post any information which you feel would be relevant and share it with other LAFs

Create an online central library - Upload your documents and presentations to the File Tab and create a central library of specialised information.

Access to information – save time by not reinventing the wheel – where you have a problem or situation, you can search for documents and read how other people have tackled a similar issue. Providing you with the opportunity to search, read, adapt and apply the knowledge to your own situation.

Check what's new – Check out the 'What's new' section for the latest discussions and file updates. We will be setting protocols to ensure that you only get alerted to things that may interest you so you shouldn't get unwanted automated emails.

Convenient – reduce your travelling needs as you can do all these amazing things from the comfort of your own home.

Reviewed and improved – Natural England will be monitoring its use and we have put together a small group of people including LAF members, Regional Coordinators and internal staff to listen to your feedback and make sure that it fulfils your needs.

Buckinghamshire County Council - Rights of Way

Summary of work Carried Out Between 1/04/11 and 15/02/12

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	NORTH+SOUTH	NORTH+SOUTH
		Feb-12	Oct-11
Alignment	Path Off Line - resolved issue	24	16
Clearance	Clearance - carried out-jobs/km	481km	263km
Bridge	Installed or repaired	47	27
Finger/post	Installed or repaired	164	60
Fly Tipping	Fly Tipping - removed	18	10
Gate	Gate repaired or installed	137	56
Intimidation + animal	Intimidation - resolved	25	16
Intimidating sign	Misleading Sign - removed	5	5
Obstruction - resolved	Barbed wire	4	
Obstruction - resolved	Barrier - Fencing, wall or other	113	67
Obstruction - resolved	Electric fence	20	13
Obstruction - removed	Fallen Tree	180	80
Obstruction - resolved	Ploughing and Cropping	118	38
Other	Delivery of materials	51	21
Other	Miscellaneous issues resolved	41	29
Stile	Installed or repaired	215	75
Stile	Stile To Gap	24	10
Stile	Stile To kissing gate	90	35
Stile	Stile To pedestrian gate	52	27
Terrain	Path Erosion - resolved	5	4
Terrain	Bank Steps	26	9
Terrain	Path Surface problem resolved	90	57
Waymark Post	Installed/Repaired	168	44
Consultations	All Planning Applications	58	128
Volunteer Hours	RA Only	1200 hours	1200 hours
Improvements	To aid mobility access	290	110
5% Survey Results	Paths rated easy to use	81%	2.5% - 83.6
5% Survey Results	Structures rated easy to use	96%	2.5% - 96
5% Survey Results	Routes with Roadside Signs	99%	2.5% - 98
Number on Database	No. of Job Sheets issued	2057	1351
Number on Database	Av time to complete site inst.	70 days	38 days
Number on Database	No. of issues o/s 31/03/11	907	907
Number on Database	No. of Issues o/s 15/10/11		1064
Number on Database	No. of Issues o/s 15/02/12	848	

Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Report Pro Forma	
* Reporting year	2011
* Name of LAF	Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum
* Name of LAF secretary	Jonathan Clark (Bucks County Council) – Policy and Katy Macdonald (Bucks County Council) – Secretarial.

Review of Current reporting year	
Were you successful in meeting the achievements set out in your Annual Report or LAF work programme? Please provide supporting information.	
We did not set formal targets for 2011.	
* How many Open Access Restriction cases have you been informed about/involved with?	
Two: Chawley Manor Farm, and the adjoining Wayside Farm at Bledlow where restrictions were in place to enable shooting to take place, and were up for renewal. We advised Natural England that in the case of Chawley Manor Farm we did not support the existing restrictions and proposed a less stringent regime. In the case of Wayside Farm we advised that the existing arrangements were acceptable, but that the increased level of restriction sought was not.	

<p>* Give up to three examples of advice given by your LAF to section 94 bodies:</p>
<p>We commented on the Bucks Local Transport Plan and responded to the formal consultation.</p> <p>We responded to and commented on Natural England's revised Countryside code.</p> <p>We responded to the formal consultation on High Speed Rail (HS2).</p>
<p>Give up to three examples where you have encountered difficulties; explain what mechanisms could be put in place to alleviate this issue:</p>
<p>We have had very good relations with the Rights of Way and Strategic Access groups of the County Council, but we have several times had cause to warn senior managers and councillors of the adverse effects on access of continual cuts in those departments.</p>
<p>Do you have any issues with recruitment of members from particular interest groups? Does this hinder your work in any way?</p>
<p>We have been unable to stimulate sufficient interest from the substantial ethnic minorities in Buckinghamshire in putting forward a formal representative. Whilst we do not think that this has hindered our work, input from this group might enhance it.</p>

Comments from appointing authority

The Forum provides an excellent group through which to seek advice and direction on matters of policy and strategy within the county council. Members are highly valued for their great professional advice and often long and diverse experience of access issues in the county.

The Forum debate on High Speed 2 Rail was lively and it is hoped members, using their position of independence from the County Council, will be able to engage directly with HS2 Ltd. in seeking mitigation for the rights and open access land over the coming years.

The Forum do not set any targets of work between meetings, but more recently the member representing disabled access has been successful in seeking and advising on new 'access for all' routes in the county. Members from Sustrans and National Trust are professionals in their own fields and, with the Chiltern Society, form key delivery partners with the county council.

The Forum have provided valued lobbying to members and senior managers during the recent reorganisation and merger with Transportation, made as a result of budget reductions. This pressure has been appreciated, despite the inevitable loss of staff and splitting-up of the Rights of Way Team.

Forward Look

What are your priorities for next year (list up to 3)

These will be discussed at our meeting on February 29th 2012.

***What support/training will you need to be able to deliver these priorities?**

To be considered at February meeting...

The training provided by Jennifer Parsons on the Huddle forum has been valuable and it is hoped Natural England will become more accessible as a result of the website.

Do you perceive any barriers to delivering your priorities?

All of our existing and any future priorities are at risk from the severe reductions in finance and resources which are in train.

Any other comments

As Bucks County Council continues to cut services, and reduce the support available, it is clear that more of the Forum's work needs to be undertaken by its members. However, most Members have a 'volunteer portfolio' – they are involved in many parallel activities. This means they find it difficult to increase the time they can devote to LAF business.

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All Local Access Forum (LAF) Chairs
[By email]

14 February 2012

From Richard Benyon MP
Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries

Dear Chairs

On 5 April 2011 I wrote to all Local Access Forums setting out 4 proposals for the improvement of information flow between Forums, Natural England and Defra. I asked Forums to consider and comment on the proposals I put forward – it is pleasing to find that all 4 suggestions were broadly supported, with two of the proposals proving significantly popular with respondents.

The proposals were:

An annual training event probably run regionally rather than nationally - This proposal was positively received. It is good to see that Forums recognise the value of networking outside regional boundaries and appreciate opportunities to learn from each other, share good practice and discuss common issues. I understand there are two events now planned for February and March and I look forward to hearing how they go.

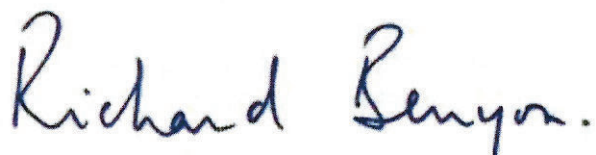
A virtual forum for LAF members - The idea of an on-line networking site for Forums was positively received. Some Forums expressed a desire to follow a hierarchical system of information flow and engagement rather than a cross-region, cross-issue method of working and reporting. There were concerns with the practicalities of on-line working. However, a pilot scheme using 'Huddle' technology is already underway, and proving popular – it's good to see Forums keen to work together and to explore new ways to communicate between Natural England and Defra. Huddle offers effective ways of supporting Forums into the future that Forums are welcome to take up, but also can abstain from.

A Memorandum of Understanding style agreement between Defra Natural England and Forums - Support for this idea was more muted than for other proposals. This seems to be, in part, because it wasn't clear to Forums what form the agreement would take or how it would be agreed. The role of Forums is set out in statute, and the understanding Forums have of their statutory basis varies. However, the role Defra and Natural England play in supporting Forums is not prescribed and a formal agreement may help all parties know what they should expect from each other.

A seat on the Rights of Way Review Committee - Some LAFs expressed doubts about Forums as local, independent bodies, being represented by ordinary Forum members, although Forum members have shown they are keen to have the opportunity to attend higher level meetings. There is no single national 'LAF view' and Forums should focus on the issues affecting their own areas, but Forum members being able to see policy making at a national level and feed back their experiences I think is very useful.

I am aware of how successful Forums are in carrying out their duties and in involving themselves in improving local quality of life. I put forward these proposals because I see them as key ways to help Local Access Forums continue to be effective and valuable players in the access agenda. Defra has tasked Natural England with improving the way Forums are supported and I am pleased to say that Natural England has committed resources to both improving communication and support. There is great deal of important work for Local Access Forums to be involved in and I want to help that happen.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Benyon." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RICHARD BENYON MP



Dear Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum,

I hope that Jonathan has passed on my apologies for not being there to meet you today, through a series of typos and misunderstandings I have had 28th February in my diary for some time and unfortunately have a meeting this morning that I am unable to rearrange.

Supporting Local Access Forums is very important to Natural England as we believe they are instrumental in shaping access work and linking it with local communities. I understand many local authorities are going through some difficult resourcing challenges at the moment and I hope that you will be able to use your powers as a LAF and be as pro-active as you can be in ensuring that access to the countryside is still championed, and that the good works done to improve access in the county continue.

I will make sure I can attend your next meeting and hope that you find the information I have provided useful. If you have any queries relating to this information or to any of your current access work please do get in touch.

I have highlighted below what I hope to be able to offer you, and would welcome some information about current access issues in Buckinghamshire, your successes and challenges as a group, and your main areas of interest at present, I expect most of this will be covered in your Annual Report but if there is anything else you want to tell me about please don't hesitate.

Best wishes,

Jenny

Jenny Hanwell (Mrs)
Lead Adviser, People and Partnerships, Natural England.
07766991020 / jenny.hanwell@naturalengland.org.uk

Natural England and Local Access Forums.

Changes in Natural England:

In April 2011 a new business model replaced the previous regional structure, leaving mainly a local (area) based structure and 'national teams'. We also have new functional arrangements – our work relating to access (Open Access, Coastal Access and National Trails) is contained within the new Access and Engagement function.

Within this function there is also a new People and Partnerships Team, the role of which is, where requested, to provide advice, support and evidence to organisations and initiatives relating to access, community engagement, environmental volunteering, green space, health and outdoor learning.

I am based just over the border in Oxfordshire, but cover Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes for the People & Partnerships team, so I will be the first point of contact in Natural England for LAFs in these areas. The aim is to have a single point of contact to improve communication of information from Defra and Natural England to Forums and raise issues and concerns that the Forums may have.

How can I help?

- Your local contact for Country Parks accreditation and LNR designation
- Primary link to Natural England for general queries including those relating to open access and ROW, including ROWIP consultation.
- An impartial and honest broker
- Signposting to information, funding and best practice
- Can provide evidence in the form of mapping and social data
- Can update you on training and new resources available for LAFs.

Other activities I am involved with in Bucks:

- I am working with Wycombe District Council Woodland Service and the Chilterns Conservation Board on a pilot project called Roots to Learning which encourages schools to walk to their local green spaces for Outdoor Learning. Volunteers from Simply Walk and the Chilterns Society are also supporting the project. Runs Oct 2011-March 2012.
- I have provided funding to support community led projects with BBOWT and Outdoor Culture.
- I attend Bucks LNP meetings
- I provide advice and information to a range of organisations on request relating to the range of themes listed above.

A bit about me:

LAFs are quite new to me so I am keen to find out more about how you operate, I hope I can bring a new perspective and help you to access any information you need from Natural England.

As I can't be there to chat to you today here is a bit of information to introduce me. I am a keen walker, naturalist and gardener and spend most weekends out in the Chiltern Hills.

Appendix 6

Before starting this role in People and Partnerships I was an Outdoor Learning Specialist in the SE working with a range of organisations to encourage more schools to visit HLS Educational Access farms and National Nature Reserves. Prior to that I delivered a community engagement project at Aston Rowant NNR, organising public events, setting up an education programme, working with volunteers and increasing community engagement. I continue to oversee some of that work today as my office base is on site. Before joining Natural England 5 years ago I worked for Lancashire Wildlife Trust on a range of outdoor learning and community engagement projects following an MSc in Ecology and Environment.

Huddle:

You may have heard of Huddle from Jonathan Clarke as regional LAF coordinator. I have attached an information sheet that tells you all the benefits of Huddle, a new online resource which helps you access information relevant to LAFs, share best practice, start discussions and ask questions.

This is a great way of finding out how other LAFs operate through changing times, and the wide range of activities different groups get involved with. It will also be a central location for up to date information relating to access issues.

At present 3 members from each LAF can join Huddle – 1 “champion” and 2 members who can all share information with the rest of the forum. To be sent an invitation to join please email Rob Leek, rob.leek@naturalengland.org.uk. Please let me know when you have joined and we welcome any feedback you have on its use and effectiveness. From my observations when using the system, Huddle is already well used by LAFs for a range of different purposes.

Annual Reporting:

A new proforma for reporting was sent to you by Jonathan Clarke last summer. The aim of the new reporting proforma is to provide NE with information from LAFs that is easier to collate, identify issues that are common across the country and help NE budget plan for the needs of LAFs for the next financial year. This is why we are asking LAFs to submit these statutory annual reports all at the same time (by December) to enable us to bid for LAF work for the year ahead.

This alternative shorter report will cut down on the time LAFs spend producing an annual report and hopefully enable LAFs to spend more time being proactively engaged with access issues and their statutory duties. However if LAFs feel a glossy report is of benefit to their work and useful promotion they are free to do one but it is an option.

The new pro forma that LAFs now have is the statutory requirement to send to NE and these should be forwarded to me. I will forward for internal collation and analysis by NE and Defra.

Given December has now passed please could you ensure that I receive your report as soon as possible and aim for an end of year report for 2012 to be ready before December.

LAF Conferences:

You should have received an invitation to attend a LAF conference; I will be attending the Bristol event on 6th March and hope to meet one of you there.

The day will include presentations from Defra and Natural England that focus on their roles and responsibilities with respect to LAFs, future support for LAFs and a follow up to some of the items contained in the letter from the Minister Richard Benyon.

Appendix 6

There will be four workshop sessions of which delegates will be able to attend two:

1. Green Infrastructure and the new planning framework
2. Shared Use paths and multi-user rights
3. ROWIPs/LTPs
4. Delivering with less

There will also be demonstrations of Huddle, Access mapping and an opportunity to raise questions. On the day we are also keen to highlight good examples of how LAFs have been able to bring tangible benefits to their local area and invite your LAF to attach examples of successes along with their response to the invitation.

Paths for Communities (P4C) Scheme

What is Paths for Communities (P4C):

Through the Treasury Autumn Statement on 29 November 2011, Defra have asked Natural England to develop and run a new grant scheme called 'Paths for Communities'. Funded through the Rural Development Programme, the aim of the Scheme will be:

- to encourage and enable local communities to work with land owners to develop and enhance local public paths in ways that deliver wider benefit; and
- to offer a network with more appeal to visitors and tourists, contributing to the rural economy through better support for local services such as shops, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, equestrian and cycle businesses.

We anticipate funding to the tune of £1m in both 2012/13 and 2013/14 financial years, and the good news is that Natural England will absorb all the management costs so that all of the RDPE money will be awarded in grants.

Key Principles

- A competitive grant scheme, supporting proposals that offer best value for money, with a transparent scoring system
- We seek a project that will be light touch with the minimum of bureaucracy
- Predominantly Rural scheme
- Needs to demonstrate improved infrastructure with increased opportunity for access on foot, cycle and horse, using simple techniques / surfaces in keeping with local character
- Voluntary path creation agreed with landowners, using the most appropriate mechanism for each situation (e.g. Express Dedication at Common Law) to enable path creation to be done relatively quickly; this may include the option of paying land owner compensation where appropriate
- Simple and user friendly; the applicant must demonstrate their ability to deliver but we will not discriminate against small or low capacity groups.
- The partnership will agree future maintenance of the route(s) as part of the agreement process (by landowner, highway authority, applicant)
- Transparency of decision making, all information available on the web subject to data protection, commercial protection, and data security rules.

Discussion with Stakeholders 1st Feb 2012

- All information concerning the scheme will be available from the Natural England Website for applicants to download. Offer acceptance and claims will be posted hard copies.
- Willing to fund a range of practical solutions such as:
 - Surfacing [but as this is a predominantly rural scheme the presumption is that hard surfacing will be minimal]
 - Pedestrian and Mobility Access Gates
 - Bridle and Horse Access Gates (including those with hydraulic closing mechanisms)
 - Kissing Gates / Field Gates
 - Horse Stiles and Heavy Duty Horse Friendly Vehicle Barriers
 - Timber Sign Posts and Waymarkers
 - Leaflets
 - Development of Action Plans for more complex schemes
 - There may be scope to pay expenses of staff / consultants essential to the development of a project.

 - Land acquisition is **not eligible**.
- Projects must show a partnership between land owner / manager and local community. Every effort must be taken to include the local Highway Authority and LAF.
- Projects which support local strategies (such as rights of way improvement plans) will be given positive reflection in the assessment process.
- Must include a partner capable of handling cash flow as grant payments will be retrospective
- The resultant routes must be actively promoted and seen to add value to the local economy; needs to be evidenced in final claim
- Projects that offer best value for money will score high; grants will normally be limited to 75% of actual costs, with encouragement to seek match funding. However, the scheme may fund up to 100% of actual costs.
- The application form will contain clear guidance regarding eligibility and funding criteria. Ineligible schemes should self select out. Eligible applications will be assigned a grants officer who will work with the applicant to develop the schemes maximum potential
- Funding decisions will be taken by an independent grants panel
- Applications will be received as an ongoing process, with the Grants Panel meeting monthly to process the applications.

Key Timescales-

February 2012: Engagement with key stakeholders in discussion of draft proposals

March 2012: Working Group finalises scheme informed by stakeholder feedback

April 2012: Scheme opens for applications on Monday 23rd April 2012

May/June 2012: First meeting of Grants panel

Thoughts / Comments:

The detailed content of the scheme is still being developed; to help this process, we would be keen to hear the views of partners and stakeholders particularly in terms of

- What we seek to support
- The partnerships needed to make the scheme a success
- Suggestions for practical solutions

Please send your comments to P4C@naturalengland.org.uk

