



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 JULY 2012, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 3, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.53 AM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr J Elfes, in the Chair

Mr C Hurworth, Mrs V Lynch and Mr J Coombe

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr J Clark

GUESTS PRESENT

Ms J Hanwell

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Peter Challis, David Briggs, Neil Harris, Alan Lambourne and Gavin Caspersz.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 FEBRUARY 2012 TO BE CONFIRMED

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2012 were confirmed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman referred to page 3 of the agenda, Item 5, Place Service Restructure and said that he believed that there was cause for concern. He commented that if volunteers did not carry out the tasks, they were unlikely to be completed and was concerned that volunteers were contributing to the profits of Ringway Jacobs. He said he would be writing to Anne James to ask how the business planning process addressed this issue.

Action: John Elfes

Joanne Taylor said that from an operational perspective there was little or no change in the way the Council worked with path maintenance volunteers. She said the only

possible issue she could identify would be in relation to purchasing of stock, but this was a minor issue and meant doing things differently.

The Chairman advised that he had responded to the CROW Act consultation on behalf of the LAF.

5. NATURAL ENGLAND

Jenny Hanwell, People & Access Team was welcomed to the meeting.

Jenny advised that she split her working time equally between national outdoor learning projects and working at a local level in her local area which covers Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. She said she champions access in Natural England and works in partnership with officers in other parts of the organisation. Jenny said she is trying to promote the work of LAFs and that she would like to attend LAF meetings.

Members were advised that Natural England have a dedicated LAF advisor called Rob Leek (rob.leek@naturalengland.org.uk) and that he is the main point of contact at a national level for LAFs and Huddle.

Jenny said that Natural England is currently trying to coordinate the publication of the LAF annual reports so that NE and Defra can gain a good overall picture of what LAFs are doing across the country.

Members were informed that Natural England is promoting a grant scheme called Paths for Communities. This will operate over the 2 year period from May 2012 to March 2014, with a total fund of £2m. She said that there is an Applicant handbook available on the website – link below

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/rightsofway/p4c.aspx>

She advised that applicants are asked whether they have discussed the application with LAFs and that this point is weighted in the application. The Paths for Communities Project is funded by the Rural Development Project for England and each project must therefore deliver some of its benefit in a defined rural area. There is an online map also available on the website to assist applicants. Applicants are need to ensure they get landowners consent before submitting an application. Applicants also need to ensure that they demonstrate local economic or social benefits of any project and there is a strong emphasis that schemes must involve an upgrade or permanent rights of way, and bridleways are also looked on favourably. Details can be found on the Natural England website via the link above.

Viv Lynch said that she was also a Parish Councillor and said that the Parish Council were in the process of writing their development plan. She said that horse riders had to ride on main roads and that the only benefit she could see for the development of an alternative right of way was that it would get vulnerable road users off the road. Jennifer said that if a project showed strong social benefits it may be considered, although she commented that it was a competitive scheme.

Jenny commented that it was originally expected that schemes would be match funded with a 75% grant and 25% match funding subject to Defra restrictions which meant that the match funding could not be public money so match funding could not be from a Parish Council, Local Authority or lottery funds. Jenny said that volunteer

time can now be used for match funding and that advice was in the applicant handbook. 100% funding can also be applied for if there are clear benefits shown and there is a strong partnership element. Jenny advised that Members could email her or the Grants Officer, Kevin Haugh with queries. (Kevin.haugh@naturalengland.org.uk)

Jenny informed the LAF that Natural England were continuing with the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey for a further three years. She advised that this had currently been going for three years. The survey monitors visits to the natural environment by asking residents which places they visit and their attitudes to the natural environment etc.

National highlights include:

- There has been a small increase in visits to the countryside and a small decrease in visits to green spaces in towns and cities
- There has been a small increase to people visiting outdoors. This equates to approximately half a million people with an increase from 90-92%
- There are strong results regarding how far people travel to the natural environment with a lot of people visiting locally
- There has been an increase in the usage of paths, cycle and bridleways
- Only 26% of visits to the countryside result in expenditure with an average spend of £28 per visit.

Jenny suggested the LAF might like to consider the information in relation to Buckinghamshire and that she would send this to Jonathan Clark when it is made available.

The Chairman said that he was disappointed with Huddle and that he did not feel that it achieved its original aim. He said that the original concept was that LAFs could register their decisions and put together national policy, although this assumed there would be an England Access Forum. He said that it appeared to be more of a general chat room and that it was not clear the status of views expressed. Jenny asked what he would like to get out of Huddle and the Chairman said that he would like to know the formal views of other LAFs about issues which may affect LAFs. He said he was also not clear about the avenue to put views to Ministers. She said that she would feedback the comments regarding Huddle.

6. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

Members had received the Rights of Way Group Report.

The following update was provided:

- The order referred to in point 9 has been confirmed.

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

The following update was provided:

- The Council started the year with approximately 800 issues and ended with 850 issues. Whilst gangs are employed on maintenance work they are not doing the structural work.
- If anyone has any ideas for Accessibility Improvement projects please contact Joanne.

Viv Lynch enquired if the funding would be lost if it was not spent this financial year. Joanne advised that it was dependant on the funding source. She said that revenue had to be spent by 31 March but that it may be permissible to carry forward a certain amount of capital funding, providing there were good reasons for this.

Jonathan Clark then took Members through the Strategic Access Update.

Members were asked to what extent they wanted to be involved in the East West Rail Consortium and the Chairman said that the LAF should be involved and attend any community forums. The Chairman also raised an issue regarding possible claiming rights and Jonathan said that this would have to be addressed should the event arise.

Chris Hurworth asked why the landowners had objected to the removal of stiles and installation of gates. Jonathan said that one landowner had said that they did not want to encourage cycling.

John Coombe asked if the normal closures for Rights of Ways would apply to HS2. Jonathan advised that HS2 would be subject to an Act of Parliament and that it would be a case of negotiation with HS2 Ltd.

7. LAF MEMBERS REPORT

Members had received the LAF Members Report.

The following updates were provided:

Viv said she went to the HS2 Community Forum and commented that she thought the meeting was conducted and chaired well. She said that HS2 representatives had commented that they were finding it difficult that there was no dialogue between the Council and HS2 Ltd and that they felt Viv understood the issues regarding Rights of Way and could discuss the issue.

Viv said that from the meeting two areas of concern were identified. These were where the line came close to properties and Rights of Way. Concern about noise was also raised and at the September meeting of the Forum details about noise will be presented.

Viv said that she was not able to discuss solutions such as bridges etc as the meeting was still in the early stages and talking about concerns and impacts as opposed to solutions at this point.

The Chairman asked if any other Members would get involved as more Members were needed to cover other Community Forums. The Chairman said that he would contact David Briggs and Neil Harris to see if either of them would consider attending the Community Forums. Viv said she could ask her counterpart if she would be able to attend any of the Community Forums if that would be acceptable to the LAF. The Chairman said that it was important that the Community Forums were attended and that if her counterpart was willing to attend that would be appreciated.

Action: John Elfes/Viv Lynch

Jonathan drew Members attention to the outcome of the CRoW 2000 open access land consultation review from Natural England and commented that the opinions of the LAF appear to have been acknowledged and reflected in the report. It was an example of how the LAF has a voice.

Jonathan then referred Members to points 6, 7 and 8 in the report and asked that if any Members had any observations or questions to contact him. The Chairman said that so long as the paths were temporarily diverted the LAF had no objection.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Jonathan informed the LAF about a project called 'Chilterns Sustainable Gateways Project'. He advised that there was £868k funding available over 3 years, which will also fund an officer based in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) office and another office in Chinnor. Jonathan said that the project was a joint project between Chiltern District Council, Woking Borough Council and the Chiltern Conservation Board. Gateways towns in Buckinghamshire are:

- Amersham
- Chesham
- Princes Risborough
- Tring

The project aims to put in new cycleways, electric bikes, provide greater information on cycling, training, community work and cycle racks. The LAF was informed that London Midlands and Chiltern Railways are also involved. More information will be provided in due course.

Jennifer advised that she had received one expression of interest for a passbook from the Aylesbury and District Ramblers. The LAF was not aware of the expression of interest and Jennifer said she would find out more details.

9. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 28th November 2012, 10am, Mezzanine Room 3, County Hall, Aylesbury

Chairman