



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2013, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.32 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 J Coombe, Mr Caspersz, Mr G Thomas and Ms N Glover

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr J Clark, Ms S Keene, Mrs C Hudson and Ms J Taylor

GUESTS PRESENT

Mr C Hurst

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP

Jonathan Clark advised that Richard Pushman was no longer a County Councillor but that he had been appointed as 'Bucks Heritage Champion'. Jonathan asked the Forum if they would like to invite Richard to be a member of the Forum as Bucks Heritage Champion and Members agreed.

Action: Clerk to write to Richard Pushman inviting him to be a member of the Forum

Jonathan also advised that he was in discussions with a farmer in the Chilterns to see if he would like to join the Forum. Jonathan advised that Councillor Netta Glover had also made a couple of suggestions for other farmers to approach. Jonathan will provide an update at the next meeting.

Members were informed that a letter had been sent to the District Councils inviting nominations for a District Council member to the Forum, however no response had been received to date.

The Chairman then welcomed Netta Glover representing Bucks County Council to the Forum and introduced Shelia Keene, the new manager of the Environment Team.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JULY 2013 TO BE CONFIRMED

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2013 were confirmed

5. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

6. CHARLES HURST, NETWORK RAIL: THE EAST-WEST RAIL PROJECT

Charles Hurst, Network Rail was welcomed to the meeting.

Charles gave a presentation on 'The East-West Rail Project'. The key points were as follows:

- The project has been split into 3 sections; Western, Central and Eastern:
 - Western is Oxford to Bedford
 - Central is Bedford to Cambridgeshire
 - Eastern is Cambridgeshire to Norwich/Ipswich
- The Western section is split into two phases. Phase 1 is Oxford to Bicester and this has been authorised and is in the process of being built
- Phase 2 is Bicester to Bedfordshire.
- The Consortium which is an amalgamation of local councils and businesses was formed in 1995 to re-establish parts of the line.
- The Consortiums objectives include:
 - Building cross party support
 - Build and maintain confidence
 - Support residential and commercial development along the route
- The benefits of the East-West rail, Western section include:
 - Easier access to London
 - Promotion of growth and additional transfer of freight
- Additional stations along the route will be necessary
- Construction of Phase 2 is scheduled to commence in 2015. Presently surveys for newts, door mice and bats are being undertaken. Surveys and consultation regarding crossing are also required.
- There is a commitment to early and thorough consultation. Informal consultations are a good precursor to this and this has started with an informal consultation on safety and network efficiency. There needs to be understanding regarding 'what is right for users'.
- It is estimated with there will be 83 crossings which will need to be diverted.
- Examples of crossings include;
 - Swans Way – this is a used crossing. Options include; close footpath, put a bridge or underpass in, or divert. If a bridge is put in it would need to be a step bridge not a ramp. It is in a cutting and not many steps are needed. If the crossing is diverted it could be diverted directly onto a road
 - Swanbourne Old Station – this is a used crossing and to the North leads to a conference centre and to the South a road. The

crossing could be closed or redirected.

- Officers will also be informally consulting with interested properties along the route

Members then asked questions.

Viv Lynch asked if mountain blocks could be positioned either side so that horse riders can dismount and lead their horses through an underpass or bridge as horses can get spooked by trains. She asked that head heights of any underpass be sufficiently high enough for horse riders and highlighted that an underpass needs to be light and airy as horses do not like the dark. In response Charles said that there are industry standards which would be adhered to. He commented that there was poor visibility on parts of the network and said that a rider would need to be near the track for the horse to see the trains. Viv highlighted that horses can get spooked from hearing the trains.

Chris Hurworth asked Charles if the 'less able' could be considered with any designs. He said that steps upto a bridge rather than a ramp may cause difficulties for some. Charles said that there would be instances where there are ploughed fields each side and assumptions are made that those using the bridge can use steps.

John Elfes asked how high any bridge would need to be if there was to be electrification on the line. Charles said the line would be similar to the West Coast main line with additional height required for electrification.

Alan Lambourne asked Charles if he had encountered any problems with the Aylesbury section of the line. Charles advised that due to HS2 the line had been moved 50m. He highlighted that crossings on that part of the route had not been looked at yet.

John Coombe asked Charles if a handout would be issued. Charles said that there was a leaflet and that he could provide Jon with copies.

David Briggs enquired if there were any design guidelines in relation to footpaths and Charles said that any standards would be Highways standards and not Railway standards.

The Chairman thanked Charles for attending and asked if he would be able to attend a future LAF meeting to provide a further update.

7. GAVIN CASPERZ - DISABLED ACCESS ROUTES

Gavin Caperz gave a presentation on Disabled Access Routes. The main points highlighted were:

- Gavin represents disabled ramblers on the LAF
- The purpose of the presentation is to:
 - Update members on the work to date
 - Canvass for members supports and encourage members to be partners.
- The 'Chilterns Roamability' is interested in promoting the Chilterns for tourism, sport and recreation.
- The countryside should be for all to enjoy, however people with disabilities or those requiring wheelchairs and scooters have been restricted
- The biggest challenge to disabled users wanting to access the

countryside is man made obstacles such as stiles, narrow gates and other structures

- There are also a rising number of older people who are becoming isolated and this also needs to be addressed.
- Older and disabled persons want to enjoy the countryside with their families
- It was felt that a short term project to run a pilot project was needed.
- Five potential sites have been identified and progress on a pilot project is being made.
- The sites have been surveyed and issues identified to see what needs to be done to make the sites totally accessible
- BCC and The Chilterns Society have been very supportive
- Chilterns Roamability do not want to see the countryside and footpaths changed to the detriment of the environment. There needs to be removal of minor obstacles such as mud, tree roots, snow and leaves with minimal intervention.
- From initial assessments this equates to approximately 10 gates along 40 miles of footpaths.
- Site owners need to be brought on board
- In 2014 Chilterns Roamability will run a programme in the Chilterns called 'Access for All', which is similar to Simply Walk. It is where whole families or groups of friends can access the countryside together.
- There only needs to be one route at each site which all users can access and which shows the suitability of the route and is graded.
- There will also be information included on a website and Chiltern Conservation Board has said that they would be willing to host information on their website.
- The Chiltern Conservation Board also has a scheme for providing grants which Chilterns Roamability will be applying to shortly.
- September 2014 will be the launch date for 'Access for All' and it is hoped that a Paralympic athlete will launch the event.
- Press interest is also being sought
- Chilterns Roamability would like the support of the LAF and LAF members. Perhaps you could look at where our information can be linked to your information.

Chris Hurworth suggested Gavin consider contacting Countryfile to highlight the project. Neil Harris advised that he had a contact at Countryfile if Gavin needed. Gavin thanked Neil for his offer and said that he needed to contact landowners in the first instance and assure them that there would be no significant changes which are being undertaken through Jonathan Clark but that he would liaise with Neil in due course.

Chris also suggested that Gavin consider contacting companies who supply mobility scooters to enquire about sponsorship which could fund the production of leaflets. He suggested that Gavin could also contact District and Parish Councils in the areas the project covered.

Neil advised that he was a member of the LAF representing the National Trust and said he would be happy to liaise with Gavin where the National Trust had land holdings.

John Coombe advised that the Chilterns Society installed gates on behalf of the

County Council. He said that not all gates are suitable for disabled users and asked what the Council policy was on stiles which served no purpose. In response Joanne Taylor said that if it is a lawful structure the stile was there by limitation (at the point of creation of a Right of Way). Removal can be negotiated with the landowner. If it is not a lawful structure removal can be discussed with the landowner. If the structure is for stock control purposes a gate or gap could be suggested to the landowner.

Gavin said that Chilterns Roamability was not looking to remove all stiles, but to have one route at this point which can be accessed by all. He said the group want to optimise what is currently in place with minimal intrusion.

8. ANNETTE VENTERS - PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Annette Venters gave a presentation on the Partnership Projects and the work of the Chilterns Conservation Board. The key points from the presentation were:

Cycle Chilterns

- 3 year project which is funded by a Department for Transport (DfT) grant. £868k has been received to develop cycling in the Chilterns
- There are 3 gateway towns in Buckinghamshire: Amersham, Chesham, Great Missenden
- The Cyclist Touring Club is the lead body. There will be:
 - New off road track for children
 - Cycle training, led cycle rides
 - Shoretrax, adapted bikes (Green Park)
 - Dr Bike at Great Missenden railway station
 - Additional cycle parking at railway stations
 - Electric bike network (rolled out in Central Chilterns next year)
 - Improved signage

Tourism Project

- This is a £30k LEADER project to generate more staying visitors

Chiltern Conservation Board (CCB)

- The CCB 'State of the Chilterns Environment' report is due to be published December 2013
- There is a section in the report called 'Understanding and Enjoyment' which explores Access and visitor satisfaction. Responses suggest:
 - Continued growth in health walks
 - Overall high level of satisfaction and usage
 - Voluntary open access is decreasing
- Looking ahead the CCB will:
 - Continue with Chiltern Cycle project until March 2015
 - Promote new off road scooter routes
 - Provide more stile free routes
 - Promote sustainable tourism
 - Input to the management of National Trails

David asked about the Cycle Chilterns project and asked how much of the funding had been spent. Annette said that a third of the funding has been spent and said that the project is on track as the project is loaded on a lot of spend in year 3.

David enquired where the next electric bike depots would be. Annette said that this is still to be agreed and said that ideally they would be in a cluster of places. Glyn raised concern that manufacturers had different connections. Annette commented that from

being fully charged the bikes could usually travel approximately 25 miles.

The Chairman thanked Annette for her update.

9. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

Members had received the Rights of Way Group Report.

Claire Hudson took Members through the Definitive Map Update and the following updates were noted:

- The outcome of the Public Inquiries for Great Missenden and Great Missenden/Wendover are expected in the next few weeks.
- The objection period for Taplow has started
- There will be a formal meeting in March 2014 regarding Pitchcott

Members then asked questions.

Neil Harris referred to the Bradenham Public Path Order and advised that he would chase.

Viv Lynch enquired if the Quainton Bridleways had been completed. Joanne Taylor advised that work is ongoing on the ground.

The Chairman enquired why the decision regarding Lower Winchendon was rescinded. Claire Hudson advised that this was due to new evidence.

Jonathan Clark took Members through the Strategic Access Update and the following updates were noted:

- The consultation on the HS2 Environmental Statement is due to start on 2 December 2013 and run until the end of January 2014.
- Publication of the Rights of Way GIS mapping data is not seen as a risk to income for the search process

Shelia Keene advised that an extension to the consultation had been requested but that this had not been granted. The County Council will focus on major emissions and inaccuracies. It is a very large document can also be accessed on the government website. Key parts are available in hard copy. The County Council is working with various partners regarding the petitioning process.

The Chairman asked members if they wanted to get involved and members agreed they did. Shelia advised that a HS2 summit was held the week before. Lawyers in attendance explained the new guidance on the petitioning process and that petitioners needed to be directly affected. The Chairman advised that the LAF could provide input in relation to the maintenance of access to the countryside and Rights of Way.

John Coombe asked if anyone could download data from the Rights of Way GIS mapping data. Claire advised that anyone could access the data but that a GIS system would be required to read the data.

Glyn Thomas referred to Agenda Item, Appendix 1, which is a letter to the Cabinet Member expressing concern regarding maintenance of the Rights of Way network and asked what response had been received. The Chairman said that the Cabinet Member had advised him that she had not received the original letter. He said he has forwarded a copy of the letter and the Cabinet Member has said that she will respond to it. The Chairman said that this is disappointing as a decision has now been made.

Chris Hurworth said that it is a concern that the decision has been made without the LAFs concerns being taken into account. He said that LAFs are not new bodies and that the County Council should be reminded that the LAF is a statutory body. Chris said that he also still struggled to see how volunteers fit in with a private organisation.

Glyn asked whether the 7 year contract could be extended. Joanne advised that performance was a ground which enabled extension of the contract. The Chairman was asked if he would write to the Cabinet Member, Janet Blake on behalf of the LAF expresses the LAFs disappointment and concerns. The letter should also remind the Cabinet Member that the LAF is a statutory body.

Chris Hurworth advised that Bridleway 52 was obstructed with large oak branches. Joanne asked that Chris report this in the normal way.

10. LAF MEMBERS REPORT

Members had received the LAF Members' report.

Jonathan Clarke asked members if anyone would like to attend the National Local Access Forum Conference. Jonathan asked members to contact him with expression of interest. If there are no expressions of interest the Chairman will attend representing the LAF.

Jonathan asked for LAF members' advice in relation to a parcel of common land called Pinner Green. David Briggs advised that there is no access to the common and that the footpath across the common is inaccessible. The Chairman commented that it is common land and that it should not be fenced off. The view of the LAF was that the fence should be removed. Members asked Jonathan Clark to investigate the issue further and update members.

Members discussed the issue of the sign which had appeared on common land in Fingest village. Neil Harris advised that he could highlight the concerns raised with the landowner.

Glyn Thomas advised that a letter had been sent to the Bucks Herald regarding the Pegasus crossing at Watermead. Members were informed that Watermead Parish Council had been successful in obtaining a grant offer of approximately £100,000 from Natural England for the Paths for Communities project, which would have been added to the £80,000 s106 funding for a Pegasus crossing, construction of a footpath and bridleway across part of the Parish Council owned land and a bridge over the River Thames, opening up access. The £100,000 grant was returned to Natural England by the Parish Council, as the Parish have said that they need to consult with residents first. Members discussed the issue and Members asked Netta Glover if the issue could be added to the next Watermead Parish Council agenda. **Action: Netta Glover**

Jonathan Clark said he would be happy to attend the meeting to talk to the Parish Council and address any concerns they may have. Members also raised concern about the s106 funding and asked when the funding needed to be spent by. Jonathan said he would make enquiries regarding the s106 funding. **Action: Jonathan Clark**

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Glyn Thomas asked what the increase in budget for access and rights of way will be

for next year. In response Joanne Taylor advised that the County Council is currently reviewing the budgets for services for next year and the Council Medium Term Plan, which sets budgets for the next 3 years, is being considered. The proposals have been submitted for review by County Councillors and a decision on budgets is expected February next year. Joanne said that if members wanted to highlight concerns regarding the budget they should contact Janet Blake, Cabinet Member for Transport or Sean Rooney, Senior Manager, PLACE.

12. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is to be held on Wednesday 19 March 2014, 10am, Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury

Chairman