



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 JULY 2014, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.00 AM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr J Elfes, in the Chair

Mr N Harris, Mr C Hurworth, Mr A T A Lambourne, Mr J Coombe, Mr Caspersz, Ms J Blake and Ms N Glover

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr J Clark and Mrs H Francis

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from David Briggs, Peter Challis, Viv Lynch, Lesley Clarke OBE and Richard Pushman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 MARCH 2014, TO BE CONFIRMED

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 March 2014 were confirmed subsequent to the following amendment:

Item 7 – Rights of Way Report

Clarification to be added that Footpath No 27 is in High Wycombe.

4. MATTERS ARISING

A copy of the draft letter to County Councillor Ruth Vigor-Hedderly detailing concerns about the crossing on the A413 Watermead to Buckingham Park was circulated for approval.

The Forum agreed the letter reflects the views of the members subsequent to the following amendment;

'Dear Sirs' to be amended to 'Dear Councillor Vigor-Hedderly'

5. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

Members had received the Rights of Way Group Report.

Helen Francis took Members through the Definitive Map Applications, during which the following updates were noted:

- Items 1 & 2 - Great Missenden, Great Missenden & Wendover
Further instruction is awaited from the Secretary of State following objections to the two remaining BOAT orders.
- Item 7 – Westbury (Route 1)
Application is being sent to the Rights of Way Committee
- Item 8 – Westbury (Route 3)
Application is being sent to the Rights of Way Committee
- Item 10 – Iver
Application has been postponed until the September Rights of Way meeting.

Alan Lambourne referred to item 38, Westcott Footpath Creation and said he was not aware that the decision had been made that the Landowner has decided not to dedicate. The 10m stretch of land which joins two footpaths is advertised as the Outer Aylesbury Ring Road. During a recent meeting, the agent advised there had been a problem with ascertaining the owners of the land, but they were happy to go ahead with the creation of the footpath. Hazel Rackman, Rights of Way Definitive Map Officer is to be contacted for clarification.

Action: Helen Francis

Jonathan Clark took Members through the Strategic Access Update, highlighting the following key points:

Item 45

This year is likely to see an increase in the numbers of applications with the increasing development pressure in the county. A total of 174 planning applications related to Rights of Way were received last year to 31st March 2014 and around 200 applications are expected this year. The process provides an opportunity to improve rights of way through developer funding.

Item 46

The petitioning process for HS2 is about to commence.

Item 47

The County Council's petition includes only a short, general paragraph about ROW. A meeting is taking place shortly to discuss the remaining issues. Most of the crossings requested have been provided with the exception of a crossing near Twyford which may be lost due to other's lobbying. The upgrading of routes from footpaths to bridleway to improve strategic links has been highlighted as one of the main items missing from the Environmental Statement.

Item 48

The start date for the East West Rail (EWR) Project is March 2019. The County Council is part of the body supporting the partnership.

Items 49/50

Meetings have taken place with Network Rail to discuss the possible transfer of 26 'at grade' crossings to nearby existing bridges or underpass crossings in order to improve safety. These are located in Buckinghamshire between Aylesbury, Bletchley

and Bicester. Discussions will also take place about the 16 crossings on the Princes Risborough/Aylesbury line.

John Elfes is attending a stakeholder meeting on the afternoon of the 2 July, during which the input from the Ramblers will be given. There is a general feeling of openness at the meetings and the LAF view will be taken on-board. The Definitive Map Team will be involved in the discussions. A new member of staff has been recruited to process orders received. The EWR diversion orders processed by the definitive map team will be funded by EWR and officer time spent on this work can be off-set against the County Council's overall contribution to the project.

Item 52

Local Area Forums (LAFs) could potentially be another source of funding for ROW projects. Each LAF has a set of priorities, outlined within Local Area Plans, some of which include improving rights of way. Haddenham Walking Group successfully bid for £10,000 from the Local Priorities Budget to replace 28 stiles on the Wychert Way. The £10,000 was matched-funded through monies raised at various events held in the community.

During the update, the following questions were asked:

Janet Blake referred to the start date of March 2019 for the EWR Project and asked if the revised date is correct. The original start date was December 2017 with a 15 month period of contingency to allow for any unforeseen circumstances. Jonathan Clark said that the start date of March 2019 had been confirmed by Patrick O'Sullivan, East West Rail Project Manager but this can be checked.

Action: Jonathan Clark

Jonathan Clark took Members through the Rights of Way Operations Update, highlighting the following key points:

- Item 53 - 1 April 2012 is to be amended to April 2013.
- Item 54 - the ROW team currently has vacancies of 1.4 FTE for Assistant Rights of Way Officers. Half of this vacancy is due an Assistant ROW Officer not returning from maternity leave.
- Item 60 - 22 parishes have signed up to the Clearance Fund scheme.

During the update, the following questions were asked:

Alan Lambourne referred to the Parish Council Clearance Fund and asked if this has been added under the proposal for the devolvement of services from Transport for Bucks (TfB). Helen Francis said that this has been proposed but Joanne Taylor, Operations Team Manager can be contacted for an update.

Action: Helen Francis/Joanne Taylor

The Chairman reported that at a recent ROW Liaison Group meeting, concern was expressed that if a parish has not signed up to the Clearance Fund and does not have scheduled annual clearance, they would be left without services.

Alan Lambourne said that the idea is to cluster parishes to carry out the necessary work.

Neil Harris explained that the Clearance Fund only applies to footways and hedges not to footpaths. The view is that parishes would use their own contractor. The formation of clusters is unclear in terms of whether this would be with neighbouring parishes and what would happen if parishes did not cluster.

The Chairman said there has been an enormous increase in the number of volunteer hours provided by the Chilterns Society. Clearly the system is beginning to rely more on volunteer efforts. Why do the figures not include the number of volunteer hours from Ramblers? Helen Francis advised that the figures do not include volunteer hours from the Ramblers as this data had not been received.

Janet Blake agreed that the system is relying more on volunteer efforts and said this will increase over the next year. In terms of highways safety and path clearance, the minimum amount that has to be carried out legislatively is a one metre strip of pruning and clearance which also applies to areas around signage. Further problems could also arise if the Government decides to put a cap on Parish Council precepts.

The Chairman said that volunteers should not be depended on entirely.

Janet Blake referred to the Stewkley Community Enterprise Agency model which is quite innovative as it is a social enterprise and non-profit making. Launched in November 2012, it manages low level maintenance activities such as grass cutting of designated Bucks CC highway verges, weed spraying of gutters and the trimming of vegetation obstructing pavements and footpaths within Stewkley village and under a contract with Buckinghamshire County Council.

<https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=27941>

Chris Hurworth asked if a letter of appreciation could be sent to volunteers in recognition of the work they have done. This will be taken back to Joanne Taylor.

Action: Jonathan Clark

Alan Lambourne said it should be noted that the number of outstanding issues has increased again – a rise over 25% in three months. Jonathan Clark explained that a large amount of work went into reducing the back log of outstanding items a few years ago. The figures will be monitored to see if the increase is due to a trend.

6. LAF MEMBERS REPORT

Jonathan Clark took Members through the LAF Member's report, highlighting the following key points:

Open Access

The background to the case at Pinner Green is a parcel of common land being fenced off along the west side of Blackwell Hall Lane, Latimer. There has been a legal requirement to obtain Secretary of State consent to carry out fencing that prevents or impedes access on common land since 1925.

The question of who is the enforcement authority has been raised. New legislation that came into effect in 2008 advised anyone could take enforcement action. A letter has been sent to Chiltern District Council as they owned the land when the fence was put up.

Transport for Buckinghamshire's Local Area Technician initially said that the barbed wire next to the highway is dangerous. The Area Technician has subsequently advised that they do not think that the fence is on the highway and therefore, will not be taking action.

There is legislation in the Commons Act to remove the fence. Alternatively the case could be taken to enforcement level (County Court) to ask for the fence to be removed. In the meantime, contact will be made with Chiltern District Council to seek more information.

Ridgeway & Thames Path National Trails

A new strategy is being formulated. The Ridgeway delivery framework is being developed by consultants from the Kent Downs AONB. The expected date of publication of the final report is the end of July 2014. A copy of the framework can be circulated to Committee Members when available.

Action: Jonathan Clark

Cycling

Discussions are ongoing between Sustrans and the landowner along the Bourne End to Wooburn disused railway line to agree compensation for the creation of a new bridleway. A period of 21 days has to be given to him to respond. There is funding in place to implement the new cycle route and a meeting has taken place with Wycombe District Council to discuss the strategic aims. If an agreement cannot be reached with the owner a report will be going to an extra ordinary meeting of the Rights of Way Committee on the 10 September 2014 seeking authority to use compulsory powers under s.26 Highways Act 1980. Any Committee members wishing to attend the meeting are welcome. The landowner would be able to seek compensation for having the bridleway on his land.

Conferences

Gavin Casperez reported that he attended the Chilterns Conservation Board Annual Access Conference on the 19 June 2014. There seemed to be a tremendous thrust to open up the Chilterns to disabled tourists and to have access for all. Disabled people do not want to be treated differently and have special areas. They want the basic barriers such as stiles and steps removed to enable access for wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs in order that the areas might be more inclusive for them to join family members. There is a lot of good work taking place around disabled tourism in terms of suitable accommodation and public transport such as taxis and trains. It is hoped that the results will be seen shortly.

Gavin explained that he is involved in the provision of a selection of accessible pathways for wheelchair users, scooters and buggies. A number of areas have been chosen and efforts have been concentrated on publicity.

A programme of disabled rambler events for July, August and September has been launched which are family inclusive. An invitation has been sent to the National Disabled Ramblers. The success of the events will be reported back to the Forum.

Action: Gavin Caspersz

Work has also been taking place on the removal of gates on footpaths between the villages of Wingrave and Rowsham. The target date to complete the footpath is the 30 August 2014; however there is still some work to be done and any expert advice or help from volunteers would be greatly appreciated.

Netta Glover asked how much funding is required needed for the footpath. Gavin explained that local volunteers have carried out some of the work, while the gate and sleeper bridge works have already been funded by Buckinghamshire County Council.

Netta suggested contacting Deborah Martin, Wingrave/Rowsham Parish Council to advertise for help on Wingrave e-postie.

The Chilterns Society will be contacted to discuss the possibility of the provision of volunteers to help complete the footpath.

Action: Jonathan Clark

The Chairman reported that he attended the South East Local Access Forum Conference on 20 May 2014. There were various interesting presentations from a number of people and organisations including the British Horse Foundation.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

John Coombe referred to the new legislation about Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour and asked how BCC sees this being applied.

Helen Francis explained that guidance has not been received as yet but can be brought to a future meeting of the LAF.

Action: Helen Francis

The National Trust

Neil Harris reported the following;

- The National Trust has appointed a new Chairman, Tim Parker, who takes up his new role on the 8th November.
- There has been a slight change in focus of the Trust. The key focus is now around land and nature in terms of getting land and wildlife in top possible condition. This links in with what the public would like to see.
- The National Trust currently has 5 million members. Membership numbers are still important in terms of funding.
- Management plans are being re-written
- Discussions are taking place about improvements to signage to National Trust areas in the first 50 yards from car parks. One example is Coombe Hill, which can be very difficult to find. There needs to be brown tourist signs to indicate that some of the best views of Bucks are from Coombe Hill.

8. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 5 November 2014, 10am, Mezzanine 2, County Hall. Aylesbury.

Chairman