



# Buckinghamshire County Council

## Minutes

## *BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM*

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2015, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.20 AM.**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr R Pushman, in the Chair,      Mr J Elfes, Outgoing Chair

Mr D Briggs, Mr N Harris, Mr A T A Lambourne, Mr G Caspersz, Mr G Thomas, Ms J Blake, Mr R Pushman, Ms A Heath, Mr A Clark and Mr W Whyte

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Mr J Clark, Ms J Taylor, Mr P Turner and Mr A McVail

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Chris Hurworth and Netta Glover.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3. ELECTION OF NEW CHAIRMAN**

Nominations were welcomed for the election of a new Chairman. David Briggs nominated Richard Pushman who in the absence of any other nominations agreed to be considered for the role. The nomination was agreed by Members present. Richard Pushman thanked Members and paid tribute to the outgoing Chairman who had put a tremendous amount of work into the forum. The new Chairman pledged to continue this good work and keep the Local Access Forum as the effective force for open spaces it has been.

#### **4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST JULY 2015 TO BE CONFIRMED**

A typing error was noted on page 2; paragraph 3 – the word '*short*' had been used instead of '*shots*'. Once rectified the minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 were agreed as an accurate record.

**Action: Leslie Ashton to correct error.**

**5. MATTERS ARISING**

No matters were raised at this point.

**6. RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT**

*Definitive Map Update*

Phil Turner, Definitive Map Officer presented the definitive map update which could be seen with the agenda. Phil Turner highlighted a number of matters previously determined by committee which were outlined in the report in further detail.

Alongside Definitive Map Order modifications the workload of the team was summarised. 7 modification orders were to be investigated, 2 public pathways had been completed, 1 was on hold and 12 others were at various stages of completion, 1 village green application was awaiting investigation and a number of TRO applications had been processed as and when submitted (an average of 4 a month). No questions were asked.

*Strategic Access Update*

Jonathan Clark, Strategic Access Advisor presented the strategic access update and explained that in respect of HS2, assurances had been received that a cycleway would be implemented alongside the Stoke Mandeville bypass as well as a guarantee that all newly diverted rights of way will conform to the county standard width for new footpaths and bridleways. Agreements made over the last three months had not yet appeared as amendments to the HS2 bill but it was hoped that this would be done shortly.

The first of two public consultations on the East West Rail Project are underway and the County Council had responded on all 42 proposed new rights of way crossings.

During discussions the following questions were asked and comments made.

**What were the views on the increased planning applications?** It was said that the majority of growth was happening within Aylesbury Vale with an increased number of houses being built in the area and together with the economic revival this was believed to have led to a significant increase in planning applications.

**How was the Donate-a-Gate scheme being marketed?** The scheme had been marketed a number of ways over the years and it was said that donors had been slowing. A Member suggested that funeral directors could be targeted as it would appeal as an *in memoriam* scheme. Jonathan Clark would explore this suggestion.

**With the Donate-a-Gate scheme currently being in the Chilterns could community groups start similar schemes with the support from the Local Access Forum and make the public aware of such schemes?** It was

recognised that there had been no coverage in the north of the county although County Council Officers have limited time so ideally there would need to be a voluntary / outside group element. It was said that the County Council could manage the financial side of any project. The Chiltern Society had run volunteer work parties to install the donated gates, but they did not have the capacity to expand into the Vale. The Chiltern Society had also been training some Rambler affiliated volunteers, a group called Ripple, to install new gates, so there may be a small volunteer element available.

A member highlighted the new Aylesbury Vale District Council lottery which was designed for community and charitable groups to apply for funding. The chairman suggested the lottery is designed for all community, voluntary and charitable groups in the Vale and it was up to them to market it to their own supporters. The first thing would be to write a letter in to the county, outlining the proposition, what it is that is wanted done and it would then be dealt with in the official way.

A member also highlighted Friends of Hockeridge and Pancake Wood Group and the work he had been doing with them on a consultancy basis. The Chairman encouraged such work, and suggested membership on the forum from them, but concern was expressed that small, local interest groups might not be a good idea on a largely strategic forum.

**Were the County Council in agreement with what was being proposed on crossings as part of the East West rail project?** Discussions with East West Rail had been amenable and the County Council had formally commented on 42 Rights of Way crossings and had been optimistic these comments would be taken in to account.

**In respect of HS2** - Questions were asked whether noise mitigation orders were granted in particular areas and what the final rights of way network was envisaged to be. Jonathan Clark agreed to investigate the noise mitigation orders. It was explained that the final network was close to having been fully decided and Jonathan Clark agreed to distribute the link to Members to view maps. A question was also asked whether all changes would be featured in next May's bill. It had been anticipated that changes would be made in advance of the bill although Network Rail had taken time to decide where to place bridges so this was not possible.

**Action: Jonathan Clark to distribute link and investigate noise mitigation orders.**

#### *Rights of Way Operations Update*

Joanne Taylor, Operations Team Leader, presented the Rights of Way Operations update which could be seen in the report. The following points were highlighted and questions asked:

- 50-60 Parishes took part in the devolvement project of managing path clearance over the summer and combined with the county council the total clearance was just over 300km. Some parishes had not taken this on which had meant that some paths had not been cleared.

- Volunteer hours had reduced from The Chiltern Society although The Chiltern Society had been involved with the Parish Council devolvement so these hours had shifted. The Ramblers Association contributed 280 voluntary hours over the spring/summer period.
- 5% performance indicator results show that from April to October 2015 paths rated 'easy to use' was down to 65% which was said to be quite low compared to last year.
- The amount of issues on the database had increased from 1423 to 1631. This was said to be linked to staffing resources and a reduced budget. Members commented that further work is needed to engage parishes and community groups.
- The issue of excessive growth on byroads and C roads was raised and whilst adjoining landowners were pursued for hedge cuts it was not always done. This raised questions around safety and the Chairman commented that a policy may need to be adopted.
- Joanne Taylor introduced Alastair McVail who had joined the team as Rights of Way Officer in the north of the county and advised that Corrinne Waldron, previously Rights of Way Officer for the south of the county, had been recruited as the new Rights of Way Bridge Inspector. The target for bridge project was for 600 structures to be inspected per annum with the bigger structures being inspected first. If structures had been found to be dangerous an analysis was to be done as to whether the structure requires closing or can be kept open with a small amount of maintenance. The amount of structures inadequate or which required repair was not anticipated and it was recognised much work needs to be done. No specific money in the limited budget had been identified for bridging repairs.
- The above appointment had left the Rights of Way officer for the south of county position vacant. Recruitment is on hold at this time, but three people are lined up for interview through an agency.
- It was anticipated cuts would continue and efforts would focus on devolving projects to parishes and communities. It was suggested that this be raised and shared with Local Members and Community Groups at Local Area Forums across the county. Two good examples of how the LAF funding had worked positively were given which included matched-funding to install 25 new gates in Haddenham and another to fund access improvements to enable a mother's group in Worminghall to walk their local countryside footpaths.
- It was highlighted the high workload impacts upon staff having to deal with increasing amount of issues leading to increased stress.

## **7. LAF MEMBERS' REPORT**

Jonathan Clark gave the following update (additional information could be seen in the report).

- Chiltern District Council had confirmed that the fence wire had now been removed at Pinner Green following letters sent by the Chairman, which led to good publicity for the Local Access Forum.
- A good response had been received from parish councils and user groups to the 2026 cut-off date letter. The Rights of Way team had offered to help out with training and the need for everything to be organised and structured was recognised. Dr Phil Wadey was said to be an expert in the area who could possibly help out. A member suggested that work could be done by email rather than the holding of frequent meetings and it was recognised that there are many online resources where maps could be viewed. The level of experience of those coming forward had been varied. Jonathan Clark agreed to look into whether Members would be charged for photocopies whilst carrying out research.

**Action: Jonathan Clark**

- LAF Member, Gavin Caspersz had attended a local stakeholders briefing on the proposed A355 Relief Road scheme to the east of Beaconsfield. Gavin Caspersz advised that the scheme was at an early stage and the route had yet to be decided so in relation to access it was too early for issues to have been raised.
- A joint Local Access Forum meeting was held to discuss cross boundary issues between Buckinghamshire and neighbouring authorities. The meeting was said to have been productive and discussions had included the proposal for new bridleway dedication along the Jubilee River network and the M4 Smart Motorway scheme. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment advised that a robust response was sent to Highways England in respect of closing Old Slade Lane Bridge for 12 months during construction, as it is the only right of way in that area for some distance.
- The Chairman attended a South East Local Area Forum Chairs meeting and advised that there were some interesting projects discussed.
- The Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum annual report had been submitted to Natural England. Jonathan Clark added that he would also be organising training for new members of Local Access Forums.

## 8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman commented that with parish councils being heavily relied upon it would benefit the Local Access Forum to have representation from the Bucks Association of Local Councils. All Members were in agreement.

A Member commented that Taylor Wimpey had provided the County Council with funds for a Pegasus crossing to be implemented on the A413 although it was not clear what stage this was at. Jonathan Clark agreed to look into this and report back to the forum with an update.

**Action: Jonathan Clark**

**9. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, 10 a.m. - Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016.

Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, 10 a.m. – Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall, Aylesbury, 10 a.m. – Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2016

**Chairman**