



# 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 24 JULY 2019, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 1, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.05 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.55 AM.**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr R Pushman, in the Chair

Mr W Chapple OBE, Mr D Briggs, Mr C Hurworth, Mr A T A Lambourne, Mr A Clark, Mr B Worrell and Mr C Harriss

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

Mr J Clark, Mrs H Francis, Ms J Taylor and Ms S Taylor

### **OTHERS PRESENT**

Ms S Bayne

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mr G Thomas and Ms A Heath. The Chairman thanked Mr D Briggs for chairing the last meeting at short notice.

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3 MATTERS ARISING/MINUTES OF THE MEETING TO BE CONFIRMED**

There were no matters arising.

**RESOLVED:** The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2019 were **AGREED** as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

### **4 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2018-2028- EMERGING ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES**

Ms S Bayne, Director, Blackwood Bayne Ltd, provided a presentation, appended to the minutes, and gave the following update:

- An extraordinary meeting was held on 21 May 2019 to discuss the emerging

findings from the stakeholder and public engagement activities; the meeting was useful but Ms Bayne felt that, due to low attendance, it would be beneficial to re-examine a couple of areas with the Local Access Forum (LAF).

- The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) would contain an 'assessment' which included an understanding of public need, review the definitive map, the condition of the network and relevant plans and strategies. It would also include information on economic needs, health and wellbeing and facilities for visitors.
- The assessment would also consider opportunities for recreation and exercise and accessibility of rights of way (ROW) to blind and partially sighted people and people with mobility problems.
- The LAF had received the results of the survey carried out with parish and town councils and the stakeholder and public engagement activities.

## **Topic 2 – Addressing Maintenance Challenges**

- Maintaining and investing in the network was the highest priority; overgrown paths were the highest scoring priority for the public and parish councils.
- Lack of way marking, stiles, finger posts and obstructions were in the top five priorities.
- 38% of the public were satisfied with the ROW service for reported issues; communication was the main suggestion for improvement.
- The CAMs system would continue to be improved; combined with monitoring public satisfaction for the new system.
- A significant number of people recognised that issues would not be fixed immediately due to lack of resources.

Ms Bayne asked the LAF for suggestions on how to improve the scores for addressing maintenance challenges and for input on what could be included in the ROWIP.

- It was noted that the main comments were on the condition of the ROWs.
- There was low satisfaction with the responses to reported problems. The Chairman queried if the reason for the dissatisfaction was the response time or that the issues were not resolved. Ms Bayne clarified that both the response time and the communication issues had received the highest percentage of comments.
- Some of the problems were dependent on the landowner e.g. footpath clearance and it often came down to enforcement proceedings which was time consuming for staff. It was queried if more focus should be on enforcement action.
- The pie chart showed that 42% of the public were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the response to the reporting of ROW issues. A member of the forum asked how it could be determined if people had too high an expectation of the condition of the ROW. Ms Bayne stated that it would not be possible; a number of people were dissatisfied but understood the reasons.
- A member of the forum acknowledged that it was difficult to manage people's expectations; it was an impossible mission as people only reported the bad news. The Chairman stated that, on the whole, Buckinghamshire had an extensive ROW network with plenty of maps available and numerous walking books in the libraries.
- It was noted that significant improvements had been made to the CAMs system since the consultation; however, it was more difficult to increase the maintenance due to a lack of resources. It was suggested that when overgrowth was reported, the system show if the ROW services were devolved to the PC. It was suggested that the ROWIP include a paragraph to say the County Council was carrying out as much as possible with the

resources available and to also include a section on enforcement.

- A member of the forum stated that, post-Brexit, funding could be available for farmers to provide new ROWs and asked if there was evidence of demand. It was confirmed that there was always a demand, particularly for more cycle routes and bridleways, but the demand had been constrained by lack of funding. It was agreed that the ROWIP should acknowledge that there was the possibility of landowners receiving funding for extra ROWs and explain how it would be handled. Ms Bayne added that there was strong feeling in areas of high change and major infrastructure such as Aylesbury, that there should be an improvement in the quality of the paths from the urban areas to the countryside.
- It was agreed that communication on how to report a ROW problem needed to be improved; however, Ms Taylor, Team Leader, ROW, stated that it was easy to find the 'report-a-problem' page via Google. The ROW service needed to be more accessible to the public but a balance was required. A spike in the number of reported issues followed the introduction of the new CAMS system.
- Ms Taylor commented that the score for accessibility for mobile users was disappointing as 1,800 stiles had been removed and replaced with gaps, pedestrian gates and kissing gates to enable the routes to be accessible. The ROWIP needed to understand why people were dissatisfied and how to resolve the dissatisfactions. It was questioned that it was probably the PC clerks who had completed the survey and that the score was good. Ms Bayne added that organisations, such as Parkinson's UK, were satisfied with the network, but had requested more information and good quality steps with handrails. A member of the forum recommended installing standard size kissing gates and offered to provide a list of where narrow gates were located.  
**ACTION: Mr Harriss**
- A member of the forum stated that permissive paths should not be lost as they created links, but it was noted permission could be withdrawn. Another member felt it was better to have more permanent pathways. Mr Briggs advised that farmers were not paid for ROWs but were paid for permissive paths and suggested that there could be a new stewardship payments for ROWs.
- It was agreed that the work of the volunteers could be mentioned in the ROWIP. Concern was expressed that there may not be such a large pool of volunteers in the future.

### **Topic 3 – Partnership for Delivery**

- The ROWIP covered a broad remit and would need new partnerships/organisations/volunteers to work with.
- Volunteers had offered to carry out work on CAMs to process reported problems; it was agreed this would be a good way forward as the volunteers had a wide range of abilities.
- A member of the forum stated that the new Buckinghamshire Council would be based on working in the community and potentially the volunteers could be involved in the community hubs to help organise volunteers to clear the paths.
- It was noted that it was difficult for small parishes to take on responsibility for footpaths; some parish councils with devolved responsibilities were managing but others required additional support.
- A member of the forum stated that he hoped the community hubs would improve the partnership working. The County Council had not forced the PCs to become devolved; the problem was that when services were devolved, the precept was often very low. The new Buckinghamshire Council would work for the public and be a positive way forward as there would be improved communication. The problem for small parishes was finance. For example,

grass cutting could be quantified but looking after footpaths could not and would be reliant on volunteers. Small parishes tended to find it easier to get volunteers; it was a matter of how it was communicated to the parishes.

- The forward to the ROWIP should include information on the new Buckinghamshire Council and how it would be based on working in the community.
- Ms Bayne ran through the timetable for the production of the ROWIP. Mr Chapple advised that the ROWIP would need to be adopted by early March 2020 while Buckinghamshire County Council still existed as all plans would be carried forward. Mr Chapple agreed to discuss dates with Ms Bayne.

**ACTION: Mr Chapple**

The Chairman thanked Ms Bayne for her work on the ROWIP so far.

## 5 RIGHTS OF WAY GROUP REPORT

### Definitive Map Team

Ms H Francis, Definitive Map and Land Charges Team Leader, reported the following:

**Section A – Matters previously determined by the Committee;** there were no further updates to the report.

**Section B – Definitive map applications to be investigated and reported to the Committee;** there were five applications under investigation.

**Section C – Public Path Orders;** 13 applications had been dealt with and were awaiting works to be completed. Four applications had been closed.

**Section D – Village Green Applications;** Number two; High Wycombe – Land off Warren Wood Drive was under discussion with the applicant.

Mr A Clark from the Chiltern Society advised that the society was not in receipt of copies of the path orders. Ms Francis stated she would follow up.

**ACTION: Ms Francis**

### Section E – Strategic Access Update

Mr J Clark, Strategic Access Officer, provided the following update regarding the HS2 works:

- Works were progressing and the ROW closures were minimal; the majority of closures would be for up to two years apart from the Denham Bridleway 3 which would be closed for seven years during the construction of the Denham tunnel portal.
- Significant work was being carried out at Great Missenden to construct the Chilterns tunnel portal access road.
- Discussions were being undertaken to keep the options open to connect Waddesdon and Claydon House with a cycle route running alongside HS2.
- Ms S Wright, Ridgeway National Trail Officer, who had provided a presentation at the last meeting, had received funding from the HS2 Additional Mitigation Fund for the first phase of a new Ridgeway Riding Route. The project would commence this year and end in July 2022. Ms Wright would provide an update at a future meeting.
- The second formal consultation for Heathrow's third runway was open.

The following key points were raised during discussion:

- A Member of the Forum asked if there was an alternative route for the Denham Bridleway. Mr Clark stated that there was but it was an extremely long way round and went via Hertfordshire to the east and Buckinghamshire to the West. The Ramblers' Association had asked for an alternative route but currently there was no other option. A new motorway service station was planned in the area and the developers would allow permissive access to the site; Mr Clark stated he would bear this in mind when considering the planning application in detail.
- Mr Clark confirmed that Bacombe Lane would remain open as part of HS2.
- Mr Clark agreed to email Appendix 2 to Mr B Worrell.

**ACTION: Mr Clark**

## **Section F – Rights of Way Operations Update**

Ms J Taylor, Team Leader, ROW, reported the following:

- The current structure was 6.4 full time equivalent (FTE) staff. A 0.4 FTE post was being covered by Mr P Fox, two days a week; he was assisting with bridge and surface capital works projects.
- Extra contractor crews had been taken on to carry out the summer clearance. The new online reporting system had resulted in an increase in the number of reported ROW issues.
- Item 34 showed a list of the capital project works as of 31 March 2019; all had been completed except Fawley FP12 which had been delayed.

The following key points were raised during discussion:

- A member of the forum reported that when searching for 'reported paths' on the CAMs Web, the footpath numbers were not shown. Ms Taylor agreed to investigate.
- A member of the forum stated he had reported a broken gate but his report had been 'rejected' because it was not deemed to affect the ROW; he thought the response was inappropriate. Ms Taylor stated that it could have been rejected because it had already been assessed and agreed to investigate.

**ACTION: Ms Taylor**

**ACTION: Ms Taylor**

## **6 LAF MEMBERS' REPORT**

Mr J Clark, Strategic Access Officer, provided the following update:

- The action carried forward to re-circulate the 'promoted routes spreadsheet' from the meeting held on 7 November 2018 was a misunderstanding.
- The second sentence of item two of the report should have read 'Chiltern District Council' not 'Chesham District Council'.
- The draft Colne Valley Infrastructure Strategy was out for consultation and covered a large part of Buckinghamshire but did not contain any information on ROWs or a link to the ROW Strategy. Mr Clark stated he would include this point in his response to the consultation.

**ACTION: Mr Clark**

## **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**8 DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

6 November 2019

4 March 2020

15 July 2020

4 November 2020

All at 10.00 am in Mezzanine Room 1, County Hall.

**Chairman**