



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

AGENDA ITEM: 3

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON TUESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2003 IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, AYLESBURY VALE DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, EXCHANGE STREET, AYLESBURY COMMENCING AT 10.09AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.08PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr C Ashenden, Mrs J Ashton, Mrs C M Aston, Mr R Boas, Mr D Briggs (Vice-Chairman), Mr J M Elfes (Chairman), Mr F Gomme, Mr R Haynes, Mr C Hurworth, Mr N Jeffery, Mr A Lambourne, Mr S Pratt

OFFICERS PRESENT

Ms S Burchell, Mr I Burgess, Mrs K Jones, Mr M Walker, Miss J Taylor

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr J Littlewood – Demonstration Project Officer, The Chilterns Conservation Board

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs B Harris and Mrs V Lynch

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest. For clarity, the following extract from DEFRA's letter to Chief Executive's, County Councils in England, on the establishment of Local Access Forums is included:

Disclosure of Personal Interests

27. The regulations require any member of a local access forum who has a personal interest, whether direct or indirect, in a matter to be discussed by the forum, to disclose the nature of that interest at the meeting. A personal interest in any matter might reasonably be regarded as one which might affect a member's well being, financial position, or business, or that of a relative or friend, to a greater extent than that of other council tax payers, ratepayers or other inhabitants of the area. The regulations do not prohibit anyone having such an interest from participating in the discussion because the member concerned might have a useful contribution to make to the forum's

deliberations. The important thing is that the nature of the member's interest is made known to the other members of the forum and the expectation is that it would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. As explained in paragraph 20 above, an appointing authority may terminate the appointment of any member who fails to disclose a personal interest in a matter that is before the forum.

3 NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that Mr Chris Hurworth would be making a statement on behalf of the Trail Riders regarding the issue of byways.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2003, copies of which had been circulated previously, were confirmed.

5 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

6 ACCESS LAND MAPPING UPDATE

There were no further comments from members on access land mapping other than those made at the previous meeting.

7 CHILTERNNS INTEGRATED ACCESS

James Littlewood, Demonstration Project Officer from The Chilterns Conservation Board gave a presentation on Chilterns Integrated Access – a project jointly funded by The Countryside Agency and the four Chilterns Highway Authorities, including Buckinghamshire County Council. He explained that the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Chilterns AONB) covers an area from Goring-on-Thames in the south to Hitchin in the north.

Mr Littlewood explained that the following had been identified as means of improving access:

- 1 Physical Improvements including paths and access to Countryside Parks and recreational areas
- 2 Access to transportation – particularly looking to see how this could be improved in order to facilitate an integrated means of accessing the countryside.
- 3 Improve information. Members were advised that there was a need to communicate improvements on access to the Chilterns. For example, leaflets should be easily available explaining how to reach the beginning of a walk.

The strategic approach to problem solving identified the provisions currently in existence for cyclists and members were advised that many existing cycle routes were very poorly promoted.

A survey revealed that approximately 30% of the population do not visit the countryside. This group was generally from the lower social classes, who do not have access to a car or who are disabled.

A 'Walks for All' Project has been created to identify places where there was good access to the countryside for those with limited mobility. The successful promotion of these areas requires the support of the site owners and the provision of detailed information, so that individuals can make their own choices about where they can go. It was aimed to extend distribution of information through those groups harder to reach, such as disability and toddler groups.

Members were advised that there was ongoing work to identify 'Miles without Stiles' in the Chilterns. This included seeking volunteers to help find routes suitable for the elderly, less fit and those with mobility difficulties (for example families with pushchairs) to use routes in the knowledge that they would not encounter stiles or other barriers.

Physical improvements have included replacing stiles with access gates, making surface improvements and providing benches, replacing steps with ramps and providing parking facilities for the disabled. It was noted that a strategic approach was needed to determine priority locations.

Walks were being promoted in the Chilterns from settlements where good public transport was available. It was necessary to ensure in the first instance that public transport could be provided to popular visitor attractions.

Mr Littlewood reported that there were more than 70 promoted walking routes within the Chilterns AONB and approximately 30 books were available describing walks. There were also more than 38 informal countryside picnic sites and 27 nature reserves. Information about local attractions could be obtained from the website on www.chilternsaonb.org.

Mrs Aston congratulated Mr Littlewood on his achievements in the year since he has been in post. Members of the Forum endorsed this and welcomed the very professional website.

The Vice-Chairman asked if the Forum could assist in improving access to the countryside. Mr Littlewood replied that identifying routes could provide assistance for those with disabilities.

Mr Jeffery asked how progress with removing physical barriers could be improved. Mr Littlewood replied that one method would be by replacing stiles with kissing gates.

In response to a question, members were advised that Hertfordshire had adopted the British Standard BS 5709. Mr Jeffery recommended that the Forum should consider adopting BS 5709 at a future meeting.

Mr Walker asked Mr Littlewood about the lessons he had learned about the sustainability of projects particularly regarding, the cost of leaflets and the development and promotion of new routes. Mr Littlewood replied that the issues relating to sustainability were associated primarily with resources. He acknowledged that without someone in post it would be impossible to secure additional funding.

8 PLOUGHING AND CROPPING LEAFLET

Mr Burgess asked members to comment on the Ploughing, Crops & Public Rights of Way leaflet that had been distributed with the papers, ahead of a forthcoming reprint.

Mr Jeffery congratulated officers on the excellent leaflet and suggested the following improvements:

- The formatting could have made more impact. He considered that a straw colour might be the most appropriate background colour;
- There should be a photograph of a cross field path that had not been disturbed by ploughing or cultivation;
- Reference should be made of the legal background prior to the second World War and include references to disabled access;
- There should be a definition of an unsurfaced highway.

Mr Haynes welcomed the leaflet on behalf of the farming community because it provided clear instructions. He cautioned if the leaflet became too complicated it would be unworkable.

9 CENTRAL CHILTERN TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Members received a report from Simon Pratt, Forum Member asking them to approve in principle the Proposed Trial Area for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan as part of the Central Chilterns Area Traffic Management Project and that contact be made, on behalf of the Forum with the Traffic Management Project Officer.

Wendover, Tring, Berkhamsted, Chesham and Great Missenden bound the Project area. It has identified two networks of 'Quiet Lanes', one around St Leonards and the other around Pednor.

One of the potential objectives of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for the area would be to link the Quiet Lanes with the existing rights of way network, particularly bridleways. As part of the consultation for the traffic management project, a number of potential links have already been identified and some funding may be available from the Countryside Agency.

Mr Pratt explained that Shaun Pope has been appointed on a 3-year contract as the Project Officer. Mr Pope works closely with James Littlewood.

Mrs Aston declared that she was Chairman of the Steering Group for the Project and that she believes that its work can assist the Local Access Forum with the development of a ROWIP.

The Chairman asked Simon Pratt to approach Shaun Pope and ask him to give a presentation to the Forum.

10 RIGHTS OF WAY LIAISON GROUP

The Chairman reported that he had attended the meetings of the North and South Buckinghamshire Rights of Way Liaison Groups on behalf of the Forum. Members

were advised that it was proposed that the Liaison Groups would meet twice a year although the dates of the next meetings had not yet been agreed.

Mr Burgess explained that the Liaison Groups would deal with local issues and provide input into the ROWIP. It was intended that the membership would be widened. Miss Taylor reported that the officers had been encouraged to extend membership to the Forestry Commission and the Waterways Board.

11 BUSINESS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The Chairman asked officers to suggest items for future meetings. These included the following:

- British Standards BS 5709 Gaps, Gates and Stiles
- Local Access Forum Website
- Training and familiarisation - specific legal issues such as BOATS were suggested.

Mr Walker agreed to prepare a list of suggestions of training for the next meeting.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1 The Chairman asked the officers to forward the comments made by the Forum on the Access Land Mapping to the Countryside Agency. This was agreed.

2 Mr Jeffery referred to a paper that he had given at an earlier meeting when he proposed that the Forum worked with the Oxfordshire Forum to review and remove physical barriers and research lost ways within a trial area straddling the Buckinghamshire/Oxfordshire border. The Oxfordshire Forum had supported this.

Mr Jeffery suggested that members of the Forum may like to meet to walk in the area. It was agreed to meet off the Phoenix Trail at Penn Farm, Towersey on 2 October 2003 at 2pm.

3 Mr Gomme suggested that consideration be given to holding future meetings at external venues, such as village halls.

4 Mr Hurworth made the following statement on behalf of the Trail Riders regarding the issue of byways.

In 1946 the Government considered the provision of greater access to the Countryside leading to the passing of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. At this time, local surveyors recorded footpaths and bridlepaths for inclusion on an inaugural Definitive Map. In some Counties, relatively few RUPPs were recorded and Mr Hurworth explained that, for example, in Dorset no RUPPs had been recorded. Mr Walker noted that there were only some 14 – 15 RUPPs recorded in Buckinghamshire.

The 1968 Countryside Act provided that RUPPs be reclassified as either Byways open to all Traffic or as Bridleways or Footpaths and the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act amended that provision. Mr Hurworth explained that under the 2000 CROW Act, RUPPs would become Restricted Byways

and further research would be necessary into the existence of vehicular rights if highway authorities were to be compelled to reclassify them as Byways. He explained that in his opinion, the proper investigations required by the 1949 legislation had not been met because of budgetary constraints, that this would similarly prevent the CROW Act's 2026 deadline being met.

Mr Hurworth explained that many bridleways should have been RUPPs originally. Mr Burgess added that a conservative estimate was that some 30% of public rights had been under recorded, both in terms of status and number. Mr Walker informed the meeting that this was also a political issue because there would be objections to claims that bridleways should be reclassified as BOATS. Mr Walker explained that 2026 was the cut off point for the receipt of claims to modify the Definitive Map and Statement based solely on documentary evidence and that no Byways could be added to the map after that date.

Mrs Aston advised members that the subject of Byways was on the agenda for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the Environment of Buckinghamshire and the County Council.

13 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 3 December 2003 at 10am, in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN