



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Report

AGENDA ITEM 7

Date: 3 December 2003

Title: Improving Access to the Countryside - Making a Start

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Summary

To update Members of the Forum on the above project since the original proposal was put to the LAF at its meeting on 11 June 2003. Since that time, a walk was held in the project area on 2 October 2003 and a survey conducted on 7 November 2003. On both occasions the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum was represented and on the latter occasion a representative from Oxfordshire County Council participated. It is now intended that the Forum formally adopts this project; that a sub-group is established to develop proposals for taking the project forward; and that that group facilitates the preparation of a paper for submission to, and formal approval by, the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum at its next meeting in February 2004. Associated with this is a proposal that the Local Access Forum recommends to Buckinghamshire County Council the formal adoption of British Standard BS5709:2001 on Gaps, Gates and Stiles in its practices, policies and procedures.

Recommendation

Members of the Forum are requested to:

- **ADOPT FORMALLY** the project as described in the paper presented on 25 June 2003
- **APPROVE** the establishment, and determine membership, of a sub-group to develop proposals for taking the project forward and for presenting the project to the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum at its meeting in February 2004 for formal approval by that forum
- **CONSIDER** the role they, and organisations with which they are connected, can play in building a consensus of support and in implementing the project.
- **APPROVE** the recommendation that Buckinghamshire County Council, in performing its statutory duties as Highway Authority, formally adopts British Standard BS5709:2001 in its practices, policies and procedures.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

The project was described in detail in the paper put to the Forum on 11 June 2003. Since that time two practical exercises have been conducted in the project area - a walk on 2 October 2003 and a day surveying to BVPI 178 (the 'Best Value Performance Indicator' for ease of use of rights of way) on 7 November 2003.

The former was described in detail in a paper distributed to all members on 22 October 2003.

The results of the latter will be presented by Iain Burgess to this meeting, together with images of typical features to be found on rights of way within the project area. The results are considered to speak for themselves in that many structures across rights of way are unnecessary, dangerous or awkward and could be removed or upgraded in accordance with BS5709 to vastly improve access.

Also, coincidentally, Thame and Princes Risborough have been accepted by the Countryside Agency as part of its 'Market Towns Initiative'. This initiative links the two towns by the Phoenix Trail and encourages community-led projects in the surrounding hinterland. The access project should clearly compliment this and open up possibilities for potential funding.

The project has engendered considerable enthusiasm and commitment and it is now proposed to take this further by the formal adoption of the project by the Forum and the establishment of a sub-group whose members can establish a modus operandi for the project to include:

- Obtaining the formal approval of Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum – to encourage cross-border working
- Determining and developing relationships between the Forum, the two County Councils, volunteer groups, Countryside Agency and other individuals / organisations
- Evaluating priorities
- An action plan
- Investigating funding opportunities
- Developing a strategy for identifying and progressing the proper recording of 'Lost Ways'
- Identifying, developing and facilitating access to disabled facilities in the area
- Developing relationships with and encouraging support from other bodies - utilising all skills / resources / knowledge

Membership of the sub-group might comprise those individuals who participated in the two practical events who are willing to participate and, ideally, representation from Buckinghamshire County Council and land managing, community, disabled and other interests nominated by the Forum.

As an integral part of dealing with the issues arising from structures across rights of way it is considered vital that the County Council formally adopts BS5709: 2001 in its policies, practices and procedures. This standard has been circulated to Members of the Forum and incorporates the philosophy of 'least restrictive option'. The Forum is requested to formally recommend to the Council that this step be taken so that the work of Officers is underpinned by adherence to its precepts.

B. Resource implications

Currently the needs of the project can be met within existing budgets. However if the project is to progress at a reasonable rate then funding sources such as the Local Transport Plan, the Market Towns Initiative or similar will need to be identified. If funding cannot be secured it is unlikely officers will be able to dedicate any extra time to the project.

C. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views

As yet there has been no consultation, however member involvement will be required, along with Parish Council's, Land Owners and other interested parties

Background Papers

British Standard BS5709:2001 on Gaps, Gates and Stiles - (Circulated with Agenda Item 10, Bucks LAF meeting 11.6.03)