



Buckinghamshire County Council

Minutes

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

AGENDA ITEM: 3

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2003 IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.30PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs C Aston, Mr D Briggs (Vice Chairman), Mr R Boas, Mr J Elfes (Chairman), Mr C Hurworth, Mr C Ashenden, Mr N Jeffery, Mr S Pratt, Mr F Gomme, Mrs B Harris

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mr I Burgess, Mrs M Freeman, Mr J Horwood, Mrs M Keyworth, Mr S Pope, Mr M Walker,

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Ms V Lynch and Mr A Lambourne

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2003, were confirmed subject to the following:

Item 6 Chilterns Integrated Access Demonstration Project

Page 3, paragraph 6, add after first sentence: "It was noted that in Law there was difficulty in compelling a landowner to remove a lawful obstruction from a public right of way."

Item 8 Ploughing and Cropping Leaflet

Page 4, first bullet point to read: The formatting could have made more impact. He considered that a straw colour might not be the most appropriate background colour. Mr Jeffery offered to put his suggestions in writing to the County Council.

Item 12 Any Other Business

No. 4, after “byways”, insert. “He explained that from the County Council minutes dated January 1954, the clerk had suggested that proper investigation be deferred and that successive Rights of Way Officers similarly had not completed the proper and correct investigation, probably due to budgetary constraints. It should be noted that this was not a criticism of current staff, however that this would similarly prevent the CROW Act’s 2026 deadline from being met.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Members received an update from Mrs Aston on the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the Buckinghamshire Environment. The following was noted:

- The Committee had not yet completed its investigation regarding Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs). The consensus of opinion was that most problems were caused as a result of illegal use of byways.
- One area of concern highlighted was the edge of urban areas
- The Committee’s aim was to ensure that the general public were better informed of the issues concerning BOATs, and of the duties of the County Council, and to enable members to pass on this information to their constituents.
- Main user groups would be aware of issues and would need to agree on shared use of byways.
- Those members who attended the Committee meeting were impressed at the way the Committee dealt with the issues.

The Government’s guidance document, “Making the Best of Byways” was circulated to Members.

5. ACCESS LAND MAPPING UPDATE

Iain Burgess, Team Leader Rights of Way and Access (South) informed members that the comments of the Forum, which were in line with the minutes, had been received by the Countryside Agency.

6. CHILTERNs MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Members received a presentation given by Shaun Pope, Chilterns AONB Transport Officer, a copy of which is attached to the minutes. Members considered they were fortunate to have input from Shaun Pope and James Littlewood. They noted the other projects in which Mr Pope was involved, such as The Tranquil Project

In discussion, the following was noted:

- Mr Pope was keen to see rights of way given the same importance as the general highway network. There was a need to have a more holistic outlook.
- With regard to Pednor, a hierarchy of roads had been developed and divided into three different categories of route to identify where quiet lanes could be established, thereby helping to provide network links across the Chilterns. About 15-20 issues had been identified in this area. Mr Pope commented that he would like to see Officers of the Rights of Way Group and members of The Forum involved in taking these issues forward.
- Signage was a problem and further guidelines may be issued by the Department for Transport. The implication of encountering walkers on quiet lanes was discussed. It was considered that if signage included horses, pedestrians and cyclists, drivers would be more aware. An advisory speed limit could also be used.

- Although maintenance of vegetation would take place in quiet lanes, studies in respect of driver psychology indicate that well-kept verges seemed to encourage faster driving. A meeting had been arranged with the Highways Agency to look at the relationship between drivers and the environment. It was noted that some lanes were not designated as Quiet Lanes because of the environment in which they were set.
- Powers to widen the roads or put in footpaths were discussed. The Authority did have powers in this area, including the provision of horse margins, but many roads were impossible to widen, because they followed natural historic features, such as historic hedgelines and ditches.
- Discussion took place on the difficulties in consulting with the public. There was always concern at public meetings that things were worse than they actually were. Once the public were made aware of issues, many changed their views. One current concern was how to consult on Rights of Way issues. The Parish appraisal system could be one way to do this.
- Maintenance issues were constrained by budget cuts. The ability to roll out programmes across areas was mainly finance led.
- There was need to ensure that resources were being put to good use and projects did not overlap. In this connection, the Rural Affairs Forum could be used as a vehicle for this, and a link into the Rural Transport Plan could help with some finance.
- There was a good collection of data to provide input to a Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

7. IMPROVING ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE – MAKING A START

Members received a presentation given by Iain Burgess, Team Leader Rights of Way and Access (South), on footpaths within the project area. The paths had been walked and obstructions and other problems identified.

With regard to “lost ways”, where bridleways were no longer linked, it was suggested that the County Council could investigate this once evidence was produced indicating that these paths existed. Elsewhere, co-operation was also needed between landowners and farmers to link footpaths through parishes.

Mr Jeffery gave thanks to Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire County Councils for their commitment to this issue. A paper requesting cooperation in dealing with footpath access had been sent to the Bucks Forum in June and was shortly going before the Oxfordshire Forum.

Although the Phoenix Trail was wheelchair friendly, some footpaths linking to it were not because of ‘obstructions’, such as stiles. Mr Jeffery saw clearance of these obstructions as part of the work in which the Forum may wish to become involved. He requested that the Forum adopt the project, in accordance with the recommendations contained in the report attached to the agenda.

A subgroup of the Forum could be set up to work on this project.

Members were informed that County Council resources were already stretched and the Authority was not in a position to commit itself to such a project. However, it was fully supportive of and adopted the principle of British Standard BS5709 2001. It was noted that Hertfordshire had also adopted this in principal.

The Forum also noted that if landowners put in items which did not comply with British Standard 5709:2001, they would be requested to remove them. However, there would be cost implications for the County Council.

It was suggested that this work could become part of the Improvement Plan, through which other sources of funding could be investigated. Once funding had been identified, it may be that the Authority could be asked to match these funds. External funding was very important and this was a good opportunity to feed into Countryside Agency initiatives. Mr Gomme offered to provide advice on funding initiatives that he was aware of.

Paul Harris from Oxfordshire County Council commented that he considered the clearing of these obstructions (to disabled access) a good idea in principle. It was hoped to present the paper to the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum in February. It was agreed to supply Mr Harris with the data shown in the presentation.

It was suggested that the Forum could review this subject once the Paper had been presented to the Oxfordshire Forum. Further work could be done on identifying costs for carrying out the work, including staff time.

After further discussion the Forum

AGREED

- **endorse the action already taken**
- **authorise further development of the pilot project, following discussion with Oxfordshire on this and**
- **restated their support in principal for the proposal.**

8. RESTRICTED BYWAYS CONSULTATION PAPER

The Forum noted that the Consultation Paper had been presented to the Community Services Policy Advisory Group.

In discussion, the following points were noted:

- Mr Jeffery noted that the signage should be in a different colour to distinguish it from other public rights of way. His preferred colour would be a green arrow.
- The Forum noted that disabled vehicles were not included in the definition of mechanically propelled vehicles, which referred to motorised vehicles.
- The County Council would not be obliged to do anything to change the appearance of these routes, but would need to give consideration to maintenance.

AGREED

That the Forum supported the Council's response to DEFRA:

- **Supporting the proposals for integrating restricted byways into current rights of way/highway legislation.**
- **Recommending that Sections 42 and 43 of the Highways Act 1980 should not be extended to incorporate restricted byways.**

9. TRAINING FOR MEMBERS OF THE FORUM

The Forum was satisfied with training in the form of presentations and considered that the expertise of Forum members should also be used.

The following items were agreed:

- Francis Gomme to present paper on the Parish Appraisal Scheme
- Mike Woods to be invited to talk about the Chilterns AONB Management Plan
- Jo Ramsay from English Nature to be asked to give a presentation on Countryside Access.
- Training on Definitive Map issues.
- A visit to Tom Bindoff's site.
- The aspirations of various groups on the future of network development.
- Presentation by landowners on how they can make the countryside more accessible. Mr Briggs agreed to contact the National Farmers' Union Secretary in this connection.
- Session by Margaret Freeman regarding the use of the County Record Office in relation to her work on the Definitive Map. It was suggested that this should be a separate session.

It was agreed that Mike Walker would develop a programme of events for next year, with the presentations by Mr Gomme and English Nature appearing as the first two items in the programme.

10. BUSINESS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The following items were agreed:

- Developing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Consultation processes for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

12. DATES OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were agreed as follows:

Wednesday 17 March 2004
Thursday 17 June 2004
Wednesday 15 September 2004
Thursday 9 December 2004

CHAIRMAN