



## BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

# Report

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### AGENDA ITEM 5

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**Title:** Strategic Access Team Update

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#### **A Introduction**

As part of a reorganisation within the Rights of Way and Access Group the Strategic Access Team was formed in September 2004. The first post to be filled was that of Team Leader (Iain Burgess). The Planning and Environment Service then looked at how it was delivering its services and developed a Medium Term Plan (MTP). This MTP process resulted in Rights of Way being identified as a priority service within Planning and Environment, this resulted in resources being moved from the Countryside and Heritage Service into the Rights of Way and Access Group. A Strategic Access Officer (Carla Boswell) was then appointed in April 2005. The final piece of the jigsaw was the recruitment to the team of the Strategic Access Assistant (Claire Tranter) in June 2005.

#### **Role of the Strategic Access Team (SAT)**

Considering the wider aspects of improving access to the countryside has, since the Countryside and Rights of Way Act become a new and important area of work. This report sets out the wide variety of work this new team is undertaking. We have been able to secure a large amount of external funds to use on improving access. These projects rely on the County Council contributing between 25% and 50% of the total cost. We have been able to secure this funding from sources other than the Rights of Way and Access Group.

#### **Local Access Forum**

The SAT is responsible for running and developing the Local Access Forum (LAF). Now in its third year we aim to raise the profile and work with LAF

members to make this forum more successful. An annual report has been produced, which can be viewed on line at [http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights\\_of\\_way/annual%20review%202004\\_05.pdf](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way/annual%20review%202004_05.pdf). This reports highlights the work of the Forum over the previous 12 months.

### **Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)**

The draft RoWIP is scheduled to be produced in April 2006, with the Full RoWIP following by November 2006. This document will be a ten-year plan of how (Subject to funding) access should be improved. For the first time we are considering how useful the network is today and what will be needed to serve people in the future. The plan will consider the needs of the less able and partially sighted. Although predominantly dealing with rights of way issues, it will look at and consider other forms of access, such as Permissive. Further information can be viewed on line at [http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights\\_of\\_way/rowip.htm](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way/rowip.htm).

### **Charter Mark**

The Rights of Way and Access group has been chosen to pilot the Charter Mark process for the rest of the Planning and environment Service. The Strategic Access Team Leader is leading on this project; the aim is to apply for Charter Mark before the end of the financial year March 2006.

Charter Mark is a customer service orientated award. Over the coming months the SAT will be working with the rest of the Rights of Way and Access Group to set standards, review working practices and gather information and examples to provide evidence for the Charter Mark application. Further information about Charter Mark can be viewed at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/>

### **Promotion and Information**

Over the coming months the SAT will be looking into how the Rights of Way and Access Group promote access to the countryside. Many of our existing promoted routes are long and contain many structures that make the routes only accessible to able-bodied, map-readers. Many of the leaflets that accompany these routes are extremely old. We are working with the Tourist Information Centres and other interested partners to try to put together a promotions package. As with all matters funding this work is an issue that will require addressing. We are therefore considering new ways of funding the work, such as sponsorship and working in partnership with other information providers such as Country Walking Magazine.

### **Open Access – The Access Management Grant Scheme**

On the 31st October 2005 a small but significant area of Countryside in Buckinghamshire was designated 'Open Country'. The SAT has been working with the Countryside Agency (CA) to plan for this access. The process has been divided up into the Planning Stage, which was completed in August and we are now into the implementation stage. We have secured a

grant from the CA of £30,000 which is at a rate of 75%, with Buckinghamshire County Council's contribution of £10,000 to the project, the SAT are now busily spending this money on real access improvements. We have focussed in on improving existing access along public rights of way to, across and linking 'Open Access' sites. This will mean over the coming months and into next year real improvements will be taking place. The £10,000 contribution was made from the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Budget. Further information about 'Open Access' can be found at <http://www.openaccess.gov.uk/>.

### **Open Access – Access Restrictions**

The SAT is working with the CA and the LAF to minimise restrictions, whilst recognising that the landowner's ability to manage the land should not be compromised.

### **Ridgeway Improvement Plan**

The SAT is currently in the process of spending £80,000 on improvements to the Ridgeway National Trail. The work will take place over the coming months on sections between Princes Risborough and Wendover. The CA is funding this work at 50%, with the LTP providing the other 50%. Further information about this work and the National Trail can be found at <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/article.asp?PageId=3&ArticleId=55>

### **Bernwood Cycleway**

As part of the Bernwood project the SAT has implemented a number of road cycling routes within the Bernwood Forest Area. Working with the National Byway and using LTP money the SAT have created 6 routes covering 135 miles. The routes can be started from Bicester railway station, Thame and Haddenham railway station and Buckingham. Further information about this and the Bernwood project can be viewed at <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/countryside/bernwood/>

### **Tranquil Project**

The SAT has been working with Wycombe District Council on this Quiet Lanes project. Work is planned to improve a number of routes where rights of way cross roads, work is being planned on improving verges to link rights of way, thus avoiding road use and a number of cycle improvements are planned. Our involvement has resulted in around £30,000 being spent on Rights of Way Improvements at no cost the County. The project is currently considering contributing to a Sustrans Project to create a cycle route between Princes Risborough and High Wycombe; it would involve improving the surface of 1.5 km of bridleway. Further information about this project can be viewed at <http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/transport/?id=519&step=2>.

## **Chilterns AONB Sustainable Development Fund**

The SAT is currently working on two projects that use funds from the above fund. The first is a joint project with the Walking you Way to Health project in the Wycombe Primary Care Trust to create a number of routes that are as stile free as possible. The second is a short circular walk starting from and involving a pub in Penn. The fund has provided again 50% of the funds, with the remaining money coming again from the LTP, more details about the Sustainable Development fund can be found at <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/caring/sustainabledevfund.html>.

## **Environment Agency Thames Path Improvement Work**

The SAT was recently contacted by the Environment Agency who are undertaking work to improve access along and to the Thames path for the less able. The improvement work is likely to take place at Marlow, subject to negotiations with the landowner. The work will involve moving a fence to create a wider accessible footpath. There will be no cost to the County Council, apart from the SAT time.

## **Green Infrastructure Planning**

This is a new area of work the SAT has recently found itself getting involved in. With the number of new houses being planned in Aylesbury Vale over the next 25 years, it is important Green Infrastructure is planned for. Green Infrastructure includes Open Spaces, woodland etc and importantly the access to this resource. The SAT have been working with colleagues from Archaeology, Planning and Countryside Initiatives to make sure Green Infrastructure is high on the agenda of those planning the development.

## **Major Development**

The SAT has taken on the role of commenting on all new major developments. So far this has involved work on the Berryfields development on the edge of Aylesbury and a major development proposal at Terriers, High Wycombe. Over the coming years this area of work is going to become a major area of work for the SAT.

## **LTP**

The SAT has been working with colleagues in Transportation to ensure public rights of way are represented within the next LTP 2006 –11. We are confident this work will result in some funding being made available for RoWIP. The SAT team has also been undertaking a number of access improvements on the ground including the provision of a wheel chair accessible bridge for Thornborough Parish and cycle racks related to the Bernwood Cycleway. Further information on the LTP can be viewed at [http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/transport\\_plan/LTP2/index.htm](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/transport_plan/LTP2/index.htm).

### **Round Aylesbury Walk**

The SAT has been working with Aylesbury Vale District Council to improve the structures on this route and produce a new leaflet. The project is now being run by the SAT and there is a budget of £20,000, which will be spent on improvements on the ground and the production of a leaflet. We will be working with the Ramblers Association to maximise the benefit of this money.

### **Burnham Beeches Traffic Management Project**

The SAT Team has been working with the Corporation of London and colleagues in Transportation to improve pedestrian and equestrian access to the site. Work on the ground is not expected to be completed until next year.

### **Aylesbury Cycling Improvements**

Buckinghamshire County Council's Transportation is intending to improve cycling provision in the Aylesbury Town area over the next two years. This is a £1 million + project and will involve improvements to existing public rights of way.

### **G2C2**

Getting closer to communities is a Council wide initiative aimed at delivering better services at a local level.

### **B Proposed Action**

**Members will be invited to raise questions or comment**

### **C BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE**

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