



Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum held on Wednesday 3 March 2021 in MS Teams Virtual Meeting, commencing at 10am and concluding at 11:30am.

Members present

Cllr A Turner, Mr D Briggs, Mr A Clark, Mr P Fox, Mr N Harris, Ms A Heath, Mr R Jennings & Mr B Worrell

Others in attendance

Mr P Fox, Ms S Fradley, Mrs E Hackling, Ms J Taylor, Mrs H Francis & Mr J Clark

Apologies

Cllr N Naylor

Agenda Item

1 Apologies for Absence

Members heard formal apologies from Councillor Nick Naylor.

David Briggs (Vice Chairman) would act as Chairman for the meeting.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the Last Meeting/ Matters Arising

RESOLVED:-

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

4 Definitive Map Modification Order Targets

Richard Jennings (Cycling UK) informed Members that he had raised concerns regarding delays to the processing of Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) applications by Buckinghamshire Council, with some applications dated 2016. He had requested information on the status of current DMMO applications, what had caused the backlog and how future progress on applications would be reported

against targets.

Helen Francis (Interim Definitive Map Team Leader) explained that her team had recently taken on two new staff who were beginning work on the existing DMMOs to reduce the backlog. This had come in the wake of a member of staff going on maternity leave which had temporarily reduced capacity. In addition, Helen confirmed that an advertisement had been posted to recruit a new Senior Definitive Map Officer. These expansions to the team were being made in anticipation of an increase in DMMO applications due to the Ramblers', 'Don't Lose Your Way' campaign and to ensure that progress on reducing the existing backlog could continue as more applications came in.

Helen also stressed that structural changes following the move to the new Unitary Authority had disrupted work the processing of applications in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had reduced access to the Records Office and restricted opportunities for wider public consultation on applications. It was however hoped that between six and eight applications could be processed per year once the team was fully staffed and the working and social restrictions associated with the pandemic had begun to ease.

It was suggested to Members that the discussion regarding meeting DMMO targets in response to Richard Jennings' request could be better addressed in Phil Fox's outline of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020 – 2030 in the subsequent agenda item. Members were agreeable to this suggestion.

5 Rights Of Way Improvement Plan 2020 – 2030: Action Plan

Phil Fox (Rights of Way Structures Inspector) updated Members that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) to improve public rights of way had been approved by the Highways Board and published on the council's website, detailing a ten-year Delivery Plan between 2020 and 2030. The plan was broken down into four sections, outlining the timescales to which the Communities, and Planning, Growth and Sustainability Directorates would operate to achieve their targets. These were as follows:

| | |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| Year 1 | 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021 |
| Years 2-4 | 2021 – 2024 |
| Years 5-7 | 2024 – 2027 |
| Years 8-10 | 2027 – 2030 |

Phil explained that the first year had been separated due to Covid-19 disruption, and would be used to address less-complicated actions and achieve initial targets before the situation eased. Thereafter, three-year sections would be used to move through the remaining programme of work. Members were reminded that regular reviews would take place to examine progress, in which the Forum would play a part, and that a regular agenda item to discuss ROWIP developments might be considered for future meetings. The first review would be discussed at either the July or November meeting of the Forum dependent on Members' preference.

Jon Clark asked for a suitable feedback window from the Forum on the progress of ROWIP. Following discussion with Members it was agreed that if the July 2021 meeting of the Forum was held in person, that the updates would be held there, if not, it would be taken at the November 2021 meeting. Phil confirmed that once Members had held the first review after the end of 'Year 1', that the Forum could decide to proceed with annual or triennial reviews as necessary.

6 Rights of Way Group Report

Helen Francis drew Members' attention to the list of ongoing work in the Rights of Way Group Report and asked for any questions on specific items of interest for discussion at the meeting. Neil Harris (National Trust) sought clarification on the point of contact for people seeking licences in relation to the Great and Little Kimble and Ellesborough – Prohibition Order along BOAT Nos. 40, 40A and 62. Ela Hackling (Definitive Map Officer) confirmed that application forms could be found on the Buckinghamshire Council Website, or people could email the Definitive Map Team's mailbox at: row@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

David Briggs (NFU, CLA) requested that a greater distinction was made on future lists between those matters that had been resolved and those that were not, so as to enable a clearer understanding of progress being made. Helen Francis confirmed that she was happy to add a table to future reports outlining the number of new applications received and completed in the past year.

Jon Clark gave an overview of the Strategic Access Update in the report, which detailed increasing numbers of path closures due to construction work as part of the HS2 railway project. A full list of closures and diversions was published to the Buckinghamshire Council website. Following discussions with HS2 contractors at pre-application meetings, it was expected that by 1st April, this would amount to most of the network, with only one footpath – the Waddesdon Greenway – remaining open on its existing alignment while construction takes place. Discussions would also be held with Andrew Clark (Chilterns Society) about proposed closures between Great Missenden and Wendover, including the Chiltern Way, which would close for four years.

Jon outlined some concerns he had over changes to the proposed diversions as initially agreed by Parliament in the HS2 Bill, which had been the cause of the extensive network closures. Under initial plans, much of the network would remain open through the construction of bridges along diversion routes, which would enable continued public access, while construction commenced underneath and along the original right of way. This had since been abandoned to 'compress the construction period'. Jon had made contact to seek clarification on the legality of this change and would update the Forum when further information became available.

Jon confirmed that a new Access for All route would be created between Frith Hill in Great Missenden and Nash Lee lane in Wendover as part of the landscape mitigation

works undertaken as part of HS2 construction. This would be done in collaboration with the Chilterns Conservation Board. Jon confirmed that the route could be shared with Members, should the confidentiality clause with HS2 allow for this. Equestrian access to this route was also being sought.

Richard Jennings asked that where HS2-related closures to rights of way were to occur, signage made the estimated reopening date clear to the public, so that overall use of the route did not decrease when construction was completed due to lack of public awareness. In addition, Richard requested that contact be made with the Ordnance Survey to prioritise updating their maps to include the proposed HS2 route so that people have an up-to-date knowledge of where HS2 was running and the status of the footpaths. Neil Harris suggested that this may be quicker to achieve on the OS app than physical maps. Jon Clark confirmed that the questions could be asked.

Alison Heath (British Horse Society) informed Members that she had held meetings with HS2 representatives regarding the plans to downgrade to footpath the bridleway running parallel with the railway between Grendon Underwood and Steeple Claydon and upgrade the footpaths between Grendon Underwood and Charndon to bridleways. Members were informed that conversations were ongoing, but that not all of the proposed footpath upgrades would now take place. In addition, a new bridleway would be created linking Calvert Green and Grendon Underwood around the existing landfill site. Discussions were being held concerning the width and surfacing of the new bridleways and alterations to the design of bridges along the routes, which would now have lower solid parapets either side (1.5m) and a mesh framework above. Alison raised specific concerns about the possibility of horses being frightened by oncoming trains. Members thanked Alison for her update and Jon requested that the Forum be kept regularly updated on developments in the discussions to ensure that lobbying efforts were consistent and could better influence the production of the final detailed designs.

David Briggs informed Members that he had attended a Thames Valley Police meeting in which it was expressed that a team of 25 Police Officers would be dedicated to Policing HS2-related protests, which could occur on public rights of way. Jon Clark explained that the enforcement team had found themselves in difficult situations where local Farmers had closed rights of way near to proposed HS2 construction sites at the advice of the Police to prevent protestors entering their property, despite this action blocking a public right of way.

Jon Clark concluded his update by informing Members that rights of way disruption caused by East-West Rail would continue for around three years along the new railway line between Oxford and Milton Keynes. In addition, the Chiltern's Donate-a-Gate and the Ramblers Donate-a-Gate projects were ongoing, though progress had been slowed due to the Covid-19 pandemic preventing much of the required volunteer work from taking place for the majority of 2020. Finally, Jon confirmed that the Misbourne Greenway cycle path had received

planning permission. It would require the closure of an at-grade railway crossing, and the subsequent diversion order was being processed. Jon would send copies of the relevant planning applications and details of the proposed route to Andrew Clark.

Jon Clark confirmed to Richard Jennings that the East-West Rail and HS2 enquiries mailbox would be more carefully monitored after Richard raised queries about a lack of response or acknowledgement of emails he had previously sent to the address. Anyone wanting to send enquiries regarding East-West Rail or HS2 should email: ewrandhs2enquiries@bucksshire.gov.uk

The Chairman then invited Joanne Taylor (Team Leader - Communities - Highways & Technical Services) to give Members an overview of the Rights of Way Operations Update.

Joanne confirmed that the BVPI Rights of Way Conditions Survey carried out between November 2020 and February 2021 provided the following results:

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Paths Rated Easy to Use | 75% |
| Structures Rated Easy to Use | 94% |
| Routes with Roadside Signs | 94% |

Joanne also drew Member's attention to the table of ongoing Capital Projects. It was hoped that they would be achieved within the financial year, but it was possible that some may slip into the next financial year. Completed projects included the Buckland Bridleway 3 resurfacing works, the Amersham FP17 bridge replacement and the Chartridge – Buslins Lane BW7A resurfacing works. Discussions with the landowner were ongoing in relation to replacing the Fawley Bridge with a larger structure.

Joanne informed Members that two additional clearance crews were purchased by the council for ten weeks to work on the rights of way annual clearance schedule. All scheduled clearance jobs were completed by mid-August 2020, but additional clearance works reported by the public including winter clearance works were ongoing.

Following the Better Buckinghamshire Review of Services, the Rights of Way Operations Team and the Definitive Map and Highway Searches Team would fall under Highways and Technical Services from the week beginning 8th March, 2021. Rob Smith would be the Service Director, and Councillor Nick Naylor the relevant Cabinet Member.

Finally, Joanne reported that due to Covid-19 disruption causing a reduction in volunteer numbers, there had been an increase of outstanding maintenance-related issues registered on the Highways & Technical Services database. It was suggested however that some of this increase was due in part to the ease of reporting issues using the CAMSWeb system.

It was confirmed for Richard Jennings that future breakdowns of the Summary of Maintenance reports would include information on priority issues, as judged against the ‘Severity Matrix’ to give Members a better understanding of how the number of outstanding issues was made up. Non-priority cases could either be responded to by the Highways & Technical Services team directly, or the person could be signposted to a more appropriate service to address their issue.

Jon Clark confirmed for David Briggs that he would consult the Ecology Team regarding the publication and promotion of advice for landowners unsure about their responsibilities concerning Ash Tree felling. Neil Harris explained that the National Trust were concentrating primarily on high usage areas, especially near footpaths and bridleways. Neil informed Members that around £180,000 had so far been spent on Ash Tree removal.

7

LAF Members' Report

Jon Clark reminded Members that the Garden Way (part of the Aylesbury Garden Town initiative) was in its consultation stage, and encouraged Members to attend the design workshops on the proposed form and alignment of the project if they had not already done so. To express an interest or for further information, Members could contact Ulrika Diallo at: ulrika.diallo@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Jon invited Members to consider the responses issued by the Forum to the Department of Transport and the Localities & Strategic Partnerships Service concerning the review of the Highway Code and the Proposed Public Spaces Protection Order respectively. The Chairman’s comments regarding the latter followed the Forum’s 7-1 vote in support of the 3-year renewal of the PSPO for Footpath 40 High Wycombe (HWU/80/1).

Brian Worrell (British Driving Society Beds, Bucks and Herts) provided an update from his attendance at the virtual Ridgeway Delivery Group meeting on 14th December 2020 with partners from neighbouring authorities and Ridgeway National Trail. Brian reported that a Ridgeway motorised driving leaflet is being drafted by the Ridgeway Officer and will liaise with carriage drivers.

Finally, Jon informed Members that, pending Member approval, the Local Access Forum Annual report - 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 would be published to the Buckinghamshire Council Website and Natural England’s Huddle page. Members were invited to give comments on the report’s accuracy to Jon before publication later in the week.

8

Any Other Business

David Briggs communicated some information he had received from the Chairman of the NFU regarding the use of a wide range of signage to ensure that as many people as possible were kept informed about the use of public rights of way.

Neil Harris highlighted the greatly increased numbers of visitors to sites such as

Coombe Hill which was up by 300% and the concerns over damage to rights of way and parking issues that accompanied the higher footfall. It was hoped that as the social restrictions eased and more public spaces began to re-open later in the year, the concentration of people visiting those sites would decrease, allowing well-worn pathways to recover.

9 Date of Next Meetings

14th July, 2021

3rd November, 2021