



## Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum held on Wednesday 2 March 2022 in The Paralympic Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.02 am and concluding at 11.53 am.

### Members present

Mr D Briggs, Cllr S Broadbent, Mr G Casperz, Mr A Clark, Mr N Harris, Ms A Heath, Mr C Hurworth, Mr R Jennings, Mr R Johnson, Mr R Pushman (Chairman), Mr G Thomas, Cllr A Turner and Mr B Worrell

### Others in attendance

Ms R Binstead, Mr J Clark, Ms J Taylor and Ms N Thomas

### Apologies

Mr A Lambourne

### Agenda Item

#### **2 Declarations of interest**

Councillor S Broadbent declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 as Chair of the East West Rail Main Line Partnership.

#### **3 Minutes of the previous meeting / matters arising**

Jonathan Clark, Strategic Access Officer, raised the following point on behalf of Richard Jennings, Cycle UK. It was reported that during the Buckinghamshire Cycleway item, Mr R Jennings asked how cycling users of the cycleway would be consulted. Benjamin Feeney-North, Transport Strategy Officer for Planning Growth and Sustainability, replied that this would be done through the Local Access Forum (LAF).

#### **RESOLVED –**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022, be approved as a correct record subject to the above amendments.

In reference to the Buckinghamshire Cycleway item in the previous meeting, it was suggested that the cycleway from Winslow to Buckingham be incorporated into the strategic spine and extend to Aylesbury. Mr J Clark agreed to feed this back in advance of the consultation of the Buckinghamshire Local Cycling and Walking

Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

Councillor Steve Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport, addressed concerns on the Rights of Way (ROW) team being under resourced. It was explained that the Council budget had been passed with the provision of an increase of up to 7 full time equivalent posts. The Forum were assured that this would improve the capacity of the team to help work through the backlog.

#### **4 Natural Environment Partnership**

Nicola Thomas, Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) Manager, was in attendance to introduce the NEP and to explore how the partnership could work closer with the Local Access Forum. It was explained that there were 47 Local Nature Partnerships across England, with the purpose of setting a strategic a vision for the local environment, work with partners of different types, and champion the interests of the environment in local decision-making.

The Forum noted the NEP's recent projects including:

- Designing a biodiversity net gain scheme by working with local planning authorities to formalise a commitment in local plans. As such, new developments would need to review their biodiversity baseline prior to development and achieve at least a 10% net gain after. It was explained that biodiversity net gain would become mandatory by November 2023. Ms N Thomas identified Buckinghamshire Council's proactiveness by working with the NEP on biodiversity and employing a biodiversity net gain Officer.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The NEP were involved in a pilot scheme to test a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) process for setting out the priorities for nature and nature recovery in Buckinghamshire. Feedback would then influence guidance for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- The Biodiversity Action Plan which was launched in the interim until the Local Nature Recovery Strategy would be enacted.
- Opportunity map to set out a vision for green infrastructure, by detailing the area's natural assets and the benefits from these.
- Work with other Local Nature Partnerships to develop growth arcs.
- Work with individual partner organisations to deliver ground projects such as Bucks Buzzing and the Buckinghamshire Council Wilder Road Verges Initiative. The NEP have also produced a toolkit to encourage local action.
- Future work with the health sector and involvement with social prescribing to help signpost GP surgeries to walks and conservation volunteering opportunities.

More information on the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes NEP can be found on their website and Twitter @BucksBuzzing.

The following points were raised during discussion:

- When asked how the Local Access Forum (LAF) could contribute and collaborate with the NEP, Ms N Thomas suggested that the LAF get involved

in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as a stakeholder. This would ensure that that the issues surrounding Rights of Way and access be brought to the fore.

- The value of working with partnership organisations. For specialist topics, the NEP would work with a consultancy firm. For projects such as the Biodiversity Action Plan, partners input their ideas into the working group to influence the final report. It was noted that the NEP often coordinated with partners to respond to consultations, both locally and nationally.
- The budget for the NEP funded mainly by Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes Council. Ms N Thomas informed the Forum that they had instigated a strategic review to ensure the partnership remains relevant and to review the NEP's capacity to undertake projects. It was emphasised that the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes NEP had been recognised nationally for their work, as having funded roles of Partnership Manager and Project Officer had enabled the partnership to propel projects forward.
- Concern was raised over funding. Ms N Thomas explained that whilst Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) were set up alongside Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), the LEPs received funding from government. The way LNPs source their funding varied throughout the county.

## **5 Local Transport Plan 5**

Mr J Clark presented this item on behalf of Hannah Joyce, Transport Strategy Lead Officer. Buckinghamshire Council were producing a new Local Transport Plan (LTP), to replace and update the LTP4. LTP4 outlines the Council's approach to transport provision in Buckinghamshire and was adopted in 2016, prior to Buckinghamshire Council's unification. LTP5 will include a public consultation, to which the Local Access Forum were encouraged to take part. The Forum noted that new guidance would be provided by government to advise on how local Council plans should be framed, with the possibility of local councils bidding for funding from Central Government.

Richard Pushman, Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum, detailed the impact COVID-19 had on travel patterns and the big push towards sustainable travel. The Forum noted the need to refresh LTP4 to make it more relevant for the delivery of future schemes and to review how communities are connected. During discussion, it was explained that LTP5 would review all aspects of travel including cycling and walking through consultation with the High Wycombe LCWHIP. Andrew Clark, Chiltern Society, emphasised the importance of transport through the LTP5 and planning through the Local Plan being connected to ensure that Rights of Way and cycleways are considered in new developments.

The Forum received an update on the delivery of the rail link from Cambridge to Oxford with a spur through to Aylesbury. Councillor S Broadbent explained that Buckinghamshire Council continued to lobby for an Aylesbury link on the Cambridge to Oxford line. Members of the Forum were directed to a previous Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee where East West Rail representatives were present to answer questions. Councillor S Broadbent

confirmed that he had written to East West Rail and responded to their consultation to assert the need for the Aylesbury link.

Mr R Jennings suggested developing an online service, similar to 'one.network', to display strategic cycling and walking infrastructure across county boundaries. It was suggested that this be raised with Central Government, to map out the national network of what had been delivered, what was in progress, and what had just been funded. On a regional level, it was suggested that possibly the LEPs could help develop this.

## **6 Rights of way group report**

Mr J Clark gave an update on the Aylesbury Gardenway, a proposed orbital park and cycleway around Aylesbury. A report and design brief of the 9 delivery parcels was due to be completed and they were due to start engagement with developers and landowners. The design brief would be shared with members once it was published. Concern was raised over the exclusion of horse-riders from the Gardenway. Mr J Clark explained that they were aware of this issue and the ambition for the Gardenway was to have an open route for horse riders, however it is unlikely that the designation of a bridleway would be achievable on the whole route. Brian Worrell, British Driving Society Beds, Bucks, and Herts, raised the concern that signage would not include horse riders.

Safety concerns were raised over the Cryers Hill Route with no public footpath, causing pedestrians to walk in the road. It was explained that significant investment had been put into developing a footway along the A4010, however the funding was not available for footpaths along every A road and work was being prioritised. The budget for road safety had increased, however priority was being identified using Police data. It was noted that Members had identified the Cryers Hill route as top priority, due to the deterioration of the existing footway.

Joanne Taylor, Rights of Way Operations Team Leader, gave an update on the Rights of Way (ROW) Operations Team. The BVPI Rights of Way Condition Survey was being undertaken to test 5% of the network. A majority of the survey was completed by volunteers, with the Ramblers Association and the Chiltern Society being heavily involved. Officers complete roughly 40% of the survey. A clearer overview of the results would be presented at the next meeting.

Regarding capital projects, all objective projects for 2022 had been sent out to contractors with the expectation that most would be delivered within the year. Surfacing works had slowed down due to storms and wet conditions. Winter clearance had been undertaken, ending due to bird nesting season. Regarding the Fawley Bridge replacement, a temporary bridge had been installed and the ROW Team were working with the landowner to replace it. Ms J Taylor explained that the team was collating a list of projects for the 2022/23 financial year. The ROW Team had been allocated £200,000 per year for the next 5 years to fund future projects.

In relation to appendix 1, Ms J Taylor noted the impact from lockdowns on volunteer

work. Despite the number of jobs carried out by volunteers being similar to the 2019/20 figures, the type of work volunteers were able complete was more restrictive. For example, less gate structures had been erected by volunteers comparable to previous years. There had also been a slight increase of outstanding issues on the system, indicating that the increase had been slowing down. An increase in reports of fallen trees were expected in the spring and summer.

In the discussion that followed, it was explained that anyone who reports an issue online through the Rights of Way reporting system and had asked for an update would receive it through the online system and via email. Once the issue had been resolved, the recipient would receive more substantial feedback of what had been done. Issues were prioritised by severity and the frequency of use. If there was an urgent case, the team would try to resolve the issue within 10 days. Most issues concerned maintenance and enforcement which they aim to resolve within 5-6 months. Due to the backlog in cases, it was not always possible to maintain these timescales. Regarding the online reporting system, Ms Taylor informed the Forum that they are investigating upgrading the system through their current provider.

In response to an enquiry about resurfacing materials, Ms J Taylor explained that they type of material depends on where it is being laid, as road planings couldn't be used around conservation sites. A lot of the ongoing projects were focused around the Chilterns, where the footpaths faced issues with washout. Therefore, the team were looking to import large angular stones to fill any voids, overlaying that with crushed stone, and then utilising recycled roach planings for the surface material. It was hoped that they could have used excess material from the HS2 excavation, however this was no longer available.

## **7 LAF members' report**

Mr J Clark reminded the Forum of the letter to Natural England regarding a pro-access consultation at Wayside Manor and Chorley Manor Farm. Natural England reconulted in January 2022, resulting to an extension. It was decided to narrow the restrictions down to one direction. Mr J Clark informed the Forum that he had contacted Natural England asking that their marked route be further South-West by about 5m. Mr J Clark requested that members please let him know if they have any further comments to add regarding the consultation.

The Forum were given an update on their letter to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Regarding the reaction times of the Planning Inspectorate to our Definitive Map modification orders, the department had replied that COVID-19 had been a restricting factor and that they were recruiting. In response to abandoning or extending the 2026 cut-off date, DEFRA decided to repeal the deadline.

It was noted that there would be a change in public path orders that landowners would have the right to reply for a diversion, however the Council would have a right to costs.

**RESOLVED –**

That the Local Access Forum Annual review be noted.

**8 Any other business**

None.

**9 Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 13 July 2022; and Wednesday 2 November 2022.