

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum held on Wednesday 1 March 2023 in The Paralympic Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10:00am and concluding at 12:02pm.

Members present

D Briggs (Vice-Chairman), S Broadbent, G Casperz, A Clark, K Haining, N Harris (Chairman), A Heath, C Hurworth, R Jennings, R Johnson, M Rose, and B Worrell

Agenda Item

1 Election of Chairman

Following the resignation of outgoing Chairman, Mr R Pushman, it was proposed by Mr D Briggs, seconded by Mr A Clark and

RESOLVED

that Mr N Harris be elected Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were heard by Mr Glynn Thomas and Mr Alan Lambourne.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

4 Matters Arising RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

Following a question from Mrs A Heath, Jonathan Clark confirmed that clarification would be sought on the provisions included to accommodate equestrians within the High Wycombe cycling and walking infrastructure plan and will feed this information back to the LAF in due course.

It was also agreed by the LAF that a letter of thanks would be written to the outgoing Chairman, Mr Richard Pushman, thanking him for his efforts and

contribution to the work of the LAF during his time as a member and Chairman.

5 HS2 Additional Projects Fund

Neil Jackson (Conservation & Landscape Officer) gave a presentation to the LAF discussing the funding that had been issued through the HS2 Additional Projects Funding Board. The slides from their presentation had been circulated in advance of the meeting as part of the agenda reports pack and published to the council's website. The following key points were raised in his presentation:

During the Parliamentary process to grant Royal Assent to the HS2 project, the legacy local authorities had been given assurance of the HS2 route through the Chilterns Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Chiltern's HS2 Review Group was established with an Additional Projects Fund of £3m to secure environmental integration and enhancement measures along the specified route (in addition to the mitigation measures undertaken by HS2), as well as oversee the creation of detailed design principles which would influence the specific design of the route.

Four projects had been supported from the fund to date:

Landscape and Biodiversity Connectivity (£500,000) — overseen by the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) working alongside farmers and landowners. Projects included willow pollarding; hedge creation and restoration; woodland planting; wildflower rich grass margins established to increase pollinator numbers; owl and kestrel boxes; and new signage to help visitors recognise, enjoy, and respect the farming and wildlife they saw while enjoying walks across the area.

Ridgeway Riding Route (£136,000) - awarded to the Ridgeway National Trail who had ambitions to adapt seven sections (between North Stoke and the Ashridge Estate) of the existing rights of way network; and to provide new links with sections of the Ridgeway National Trail already open to horse and bike riders. Funds had also been put towards improved surfacing for accessibility purposes.

Wendover Canal Towpath Upgrade (£291,500 awarded April 2021, further £380,000 awarded November 2022) - to upgrade the badly deteriorated towpath within the parishes of Wendover and Halton. The upgraded towpath would become part of the Grand Union Canal triangle.

Misbourne Greenway (£330,000) - awarded to complete the final 1km of the 4km route between Great Missenden and Wendover after delays and inflationary pressure meant that the original Department for Transport award would not be sufficient to complete the route.

Following questions, points of clarification were made for the LAF:

The CCB was supporting and working alongside farmers and landowners situated

outside the immediate HS2 construction corridor as part of the Heritage Lottery funded landscape partnership scheme within the central Chilterns area. The projects through which this support was being given would be detailed online over the coming weeks, but Neil Jackson confirmed that he was happy to circulate the background reports to the LAF in the meantime.

The Ridgeway Riding Route project included improvements to the walking route, though it was clarified that the two remained largely separate. It was hoped that existing access tracks currently used by HS2 for maintenance purposes between Frith Hill, Wendover Dean and Rocky Lane, as well as the cut and cover tunnel between Bacombe Road and Ashley Road, could be incorporated into the design of the project's new links for walkers and horse riders, with a possibility that some or all of the work would be undertaken by HS2 themselves. These two proposed access improvements were called the 'Northern Link' and the 'Wendover Link' respectively.

The environmental integration and enhancement measures outlined in the presentation were separate from and in addition to mitigation provided by HS2, as they had given assurances that those efforts would be undertaken by them during the Parliamentary Select Committee process.

Some of the repurposed access tracks would become designated rights of way through the HS2 Act, but the council will ask HS2 for other routes, not included in the Act, also be designated. Neil explained that the tracks would need to be robust enough to support use by maintenance vehicles, so would likely be appropriate for equestrian and cycle use. The distance between some of the tracks and the railway line would require consultation with organisations such as the British Horse Society to determine if they would be suitable as bridleways.

Members thanked Neil for his time and presentation.

6 Ridgeway 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Sarah Wright (Ridgeway National Trail Officer) updated the LAF on the ongoing celebrations commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail, which had been opened in 1973 by Lord Nugent. This included a variety of <u>social events</u> throughout 2023. The slides from her presentation would be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

The following key points were raised in her presentation.

The anniversary events aimed to celebrate the Ridgeway's history, as well as look forward to the next fifty years, and take input on what changes people would like to see in the future. This included efforts to preserve the Ridgeway, teaching people the countryside code and how to be a friendly, caring visitor to keep the Ridgeway special.

Mary-Ann Ochota (anthropologist, broadcaster and author) had been promoting the anniversary across various media appearances. She would deliver a talk about the Ridgeway at the Chiltern Heritage Festival in September 2023, as well as participate

in a University of Oxford day course on 18th March 2023.

A leaflet highlighting the key features, history and heritage of the Ridgeway was available as free download and would also be made available to tourist information centres locally.

Sarah left members with four questions to consider and feedback ideas to Jonathan Clark, who would pass suggestions to her following the meeting. These were as follows:

- 1. Can you suggest VIPs to invite to the September event at Coombe Hill? Please use your influence to attract VIPs to this event as Buckinghamshire has a key role to play at this location.
- 2. Do you know someone who would be engaging and can interpret the view from Coombe Hill at our September event?
- What groups in Buckinghamshire could help us draw new audiences to The Ridgeway? We want to retain our existing visitors but also attract new visitors.
- 4. What does your LAF want to see along The Ridgeway in 50 years' time? What should stay the same and what needs to change to cater for a different society? What role should Buckinghamshire stakeholders play over the next 50 years?

7 Slow Ways

James Sprately (Strategic Access Officer) gave an overview of the Slow Ways initiative, which aimed to connect populated places across Great Britain via a network of walking routes. The slides from his presentation would be appended to the minutes of the meeting. The following key points were raised in the overview:

Slow ways were not just a single right of way, but a combination of several rights of way to create links between populated spaces.

The project was volunteer lead, with slow ways 'swarms' identifying and registering slow ways on the <u>website</u>. This process included a survey and verification system to help potential future users of a Slow Way identify which particular route between places would work best for their needs.

The project aimed to fill a gap by bringing a comprehensive list of rights of way, similar to a traditional Ordnance Survey maps into the digital space. James identified that younger walkers were used to using Google maps to navigate, but that this did not have quite the depth that Slow Ways could offer.

A meeting had been held with Dan Raven-Ellison, the founder of the Slow Ways project, and it had been made clear that there was an aim to move away from a purely digital presence. This could take the shape of signage, waypoint markers and physical maps for some Slow Ways routes in the future.

At the time of the LAF meeting, thirteen places in Buckinghamshire were navigable via one of fifty-nine Slow Ways. Seventy-five routes could be chosen by potential ramblers, as some Slow Ways had more than one route option, and seventeen of those routes had been verified (having had three or more positive reviews).

It was hoped that 100% verification could be achieved for Slow Ways in Buckinghamshire with the help of the LAF to promote the project through volunteer networks and supporting events. Any feedback and ideas were warmly received and could be passed on to James Spratley following the meeting.

Following questions, the following was clarified for the LAF:

As Slow Ways heavily used the rights of way network, it was possible that some routes would have stiles and steps, which could cause accessibility issues for some users. It remained an aim of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan to remove any stiles from the rights of way network. James suggested that for those unable to navigate a route using stiles or steps, a filter on the Slow Ways map to remove such routes might be a useful feature which he would seek to raise. It would also be within the power of the council to require a step and stile free route for any physically marked Slow Way, should one be identified in the future.

Slow Ways were less intended for circular, recreational walks, and were meant as a way to replace driving between two places. It was hoped that the number of start/finish nodes across Buckinghamshire would increase to ensure that as many people as possible had access to a slow Ways network within reasonable distance of their home.

Any physical signage along a Slow Way would need to include the distance and time to reach different destinations from that point.

Slow Ways operates via a website rather than an app.

A point was raised regarding the possibility of putting all the access routes across Buckinghamshire into a single place, as there was a lack of integrated thinking with various routes not appearing in tandem with others.

Members thanked James for his overview.

8 Rights of Way Group Update

Claire Hudson (Definitive Map and Highways Searches Team Leader) gave an overview of the report which had been circulated prior to the meeting and offered to respond to questions:

It was confirmed that the Bernwood Jubilee Way was not suitable for use by horse riders or carriage drivers on section not designated as bridleway or restricted byway.

Jonathan Clark drew attention to the Strategic Access section of the report which

included the following:

A planning meeting had been held regarding RAF Halton to discuss the strategic layout for the site in preparation for a draft Supplementary Planning Document to shape a residential development for around 1,000 new homes once the MOD vacate the site.

The Wendover section of the Buckinghamshire Greenway would open in midsummer 2023. The requirement to divert Footpath GMI/70/4, which removed pedestrians from passing across the railway line at Road Farm, Great Missenden, had been confirmed by the Secretary of State and would be closed (and diverted towards Town End Farm, Aylesbury Road) when the greenway was brought into use.

Rights of way maintenance, definitive map, and strategic access officers continued to inspect and reopen rights of way which had closed to allow East-West Rail construction work to proceed.

Joanne Taylor (Rights of Way Operations Team Leader) confirmed that the Rights of way team was currently operating at near full complement, with seven full-time equivalent posts following the appointment of Phill Fox as the new Area Rights of Way Officer covering the south-east Buckinghamshire.

The 5% network BVPI survey was ongoing, with insufficient data as of the meeting to provide interim results.

9 LAF Members' Report

Jonathan Clark gave an overview of the report which had been circulated as part of the agenda reports pack prior to the meeting and uploaded to the council's website. There were no questions.

David Briggs queried whether there was any means by which the usage of public footpaths was monitored, as he has experienced a higher percentage of walkers across his farm since the end of the COVID-19 lockdown. The increase in footfall had been causing concerns about the structural suitability of the footpaths, and it was suggested that it might be necessary to budget for future footpath improvements if this was reflected across the wider rights of way network. Jonathan Clark suggested that this could be discussed further at the next meeting to allow time for officers to examine the issue before responding.

10 Dates of the Next Meetings

It was noted that the LAF would meet at 10am in the Paralympic Room at The Gateway, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF on the following dates:

- 19th July 2023
- 1st November 2023





Coombe Hill, Bucks An important place in the history of countryside access





June 21st, 1906.

The Ridgeway National Trail was formally opened on Coombe Hill on 29th September 1973. This September's commemorative event will be the highlight of the anniversary. We will look back at what has been achieved so far and pull together ideas and resources to realise the Ridgeway Future 50 vision.



50th anniversary outlook: Inspire to visit – Equip to visit – Caring visitors





Join Chewbacca, King Alfred, Mary-Ann Ochota, Churchill, Merlin and many more to celebrate The Ridgeway's 50th anniversary!

Ridgeway Future 50



On the Trail, online and in the press





Free monthly spotter challenges
Guided runs Art workshops
Bioblitz Mary-Ann Ochota talk
'Top 50' Sunday 7pm short stories
Oxford University day course

Go to the anniversary webpage for more events and activities



New map and leaflet





Media coverage and level of awareness



RIDGEWAY ANNIVERSARY





1973-2023

KEEPING THE RIDGEWAY SPECIAL

This year, discover The Ridgeway's famous people and places, and influence its future.

Since The Ridgeway was officially opened on Coombe Hill in 1973 as a National Trail by Lord Nugent it's welcomed hundreds of thousands of visitors and shared many stories.

Meet the anniversary patron, Mary-Ann Ochota



Since January....

- Guardian Travel section paper and online
- Countryfile podcast
- BBC Radio Wiltshire on air, social media, webpages
- Swindon 105.5 FM
- BBC Three Counties Radio
- Cycling UK magazine
- Chiltern Society magazine 4 page pull-out
- South East Ramblers magazine
- Three new packages with holiday companies

Hoping for future coverage with Countryfile TV; National Trust social media.

Keeping The Ridgeway special Ridgeway Future 50



Be a caring, friendly visitor

Everyone plays their part in looking after The Ridgeway and making it a friendly place. Report problems to the Ridgeway Officer and share your favourite photos and stories on social media. Ensure you are a considerate sitor by knowing the **Code** and athering to Trail signage.

Walking, cycling and horse riding are carbon-free activities. Visitors can further reduce their environmental impact by travelling to the Trail without their car and choosing locally-sourced

and sustainable products and services. Our website provides further details about sustainable choices including public transport and cycle hire (including electric bicycles).

Dog walkers – please keep your dog under control to reduce distress to livestock, ground-nesting birds and other visitors. Use bins to dispose of dog waste responsibly.

Cyclists – slow down around walkers and horse riders and, if approaching from behind, call out 'hello' in advance.

New visitor leaflet explains how to be a caring visitor

Inviting ideas from all parts of society about what they would like to see along The Ridgeway in 50 years

The Friends of the Ridgeway

Registered Charity No. 1107926

1. Donation 2. Your details 3. Payment

service has been designed for donors using funds from a personal account . Any donations identified as coming from a

n

Friends of the Ridgeway dedicated donation page

on CAF website

How often would you like to donate?

Just one donation

I'd like to give regularly

How much would you like to donate?

£ 10.00

£ 30.00

£ 50.00

Custom

The Ridgeway National Trail 50th anniversary

It is 50 years since The Ridgeway opened as a National Trail and this makes 2023 an opportune time for Friends of the Ridgeway to raise funds to maintain and improve the National Trail. Everyone is invited to celebrate the 50th anniversary by taking part in events and activities and by caring for the Trail. One way to care for The Ridgeway is to make a donation, however large or small.

<u>Find out more</u> about this charity or campaign



Invitation to Buckinghamshire LAF to get involved

Can you suggest VIPs to invite to the September event at Coombe Hill? Please use your influence to attract VIPs to this event as Buckinghamshire has a key role to play at this location.

Do you know someone who would be very engaging and can interpret the view from Coombe Hill at our September event?

What groups in Buckinghamshire could help us draw <u>new</u> audiences to The Ridgeway? We want to retain our existing visitors but also attract new visitors.

What does your LAF want to see along The Ridgeway in 50 years time? What should stay the same and what needs to change to cater for society? What role should Buckinghamshire stakeholders play over the next 50 years?



Keep in touch



Anniversary webpage www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway_anniversary2023/

Ridgeway Project Officer - Sarah Wright sarah.wright@oxfordshire.gov.uk 07825 314791

To report a problem on The Ridgeway, tell the National Trail Team and/or the local highway authority -

ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk
01865 810248
If urgent, call 07825 314791
If you see a crime in progress on The Ridgeway, call 999. Otherwise, call 101.

For visitor info and other enquiries: ridgeway@oxfordshire.gov.uk 01865 810248

www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway
https://www.facebook.com/RidgewayNationalTrail
https://twitter.com/TheRidgeway1972
https://www.instagram.com/ridgeway national trail/

https://www.flickr.com/photos/theridgeway/albums

Slow Ways

Help create a national walking network

James Spratley

Strategic Access Officer – Buckinghamshire Council

Introduction to the Slow Ways Project

01

What's Slow Ways?

02

What benefits do Slow Ways bring?

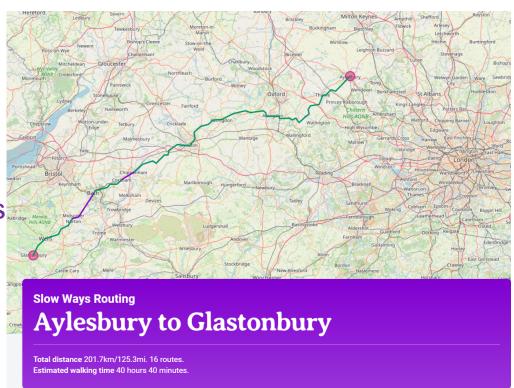
03

What assistance can we provide?

- Slow Ways is an initiative to create a national network of walking routes connecting all of Great Britain's populated places.
- It aims to inspire and support more people to walk further and more often, for more purposes than they do currently.
- The Slow Ways network combines the existing network of public rights of way, permissive paths, ways, trails, and roads to allow for people to plan and go on walking journeys.
- Emerging in the Spring 2020 lockdown the Slow Ways volunteer 'swarms' have mapped over 8000 Slow Ways that stretch for almost 120,000km.
- The Slow Ways map is currently available to access online (https://beta.slowways.org/) alongside a Journey Planner and Routing tool which helps the user to chart the stages of a medium-to-long distance walk



- Currently there isn't a comprehensive and trusted network of routes designed to help people walk offroad between towns and cities.
- In many ways similar to the Public Rights of Way network, Slow Ways incorporate a survey and verification system which inform the user which ways are best to go.
- Slow Ways aims to inspire and support more people to walk more often, further and for more purposes.



- Currently receiving positive media coverage and interest
- Nationally recognised
- Website allows the user to create very detailed journey plans and route maps, with OS Map Overlays and GIS functionality



















Here's a selection of news stories about Slow Ways:

"Walk this way: army of hikers will road-test new map of footpaths" The Guardian

"Slow map: Mapping Britain's intercity footpaths" BBC News

"Can the 'Slow Ways' project change how we travel?" The Telegraph

"New national walking network gets thumbs up from town council" Frome Times

"How you can help plot the future of UK walking - from a standstill" National Geographic

"How the Slow Ways network could change walking in Britain" The Guardian

"New network of 7,000 walking routes connects Britain's towns, cities and villages for the first time" Country Living

"Britain's all new Slow Ways to bring back the old ways" Times of India

"Life after lockdown: one man's plan to get the UK back on its feet" Positive News

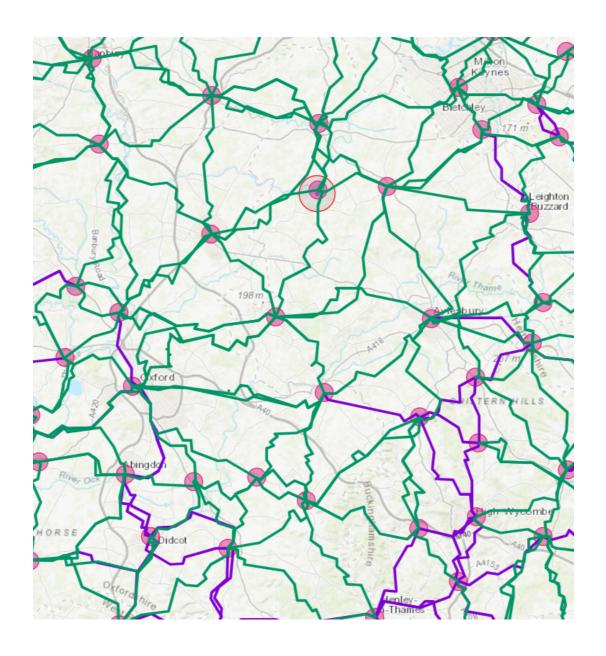
"New hiking network in the UK connects 2,500 towns, cities and notable spots" Metro

"A new hiking network links thousands of towns around Britain" Lonely Planet

"Can a network of 7000 walking routes transform the way we travel?" Euro News

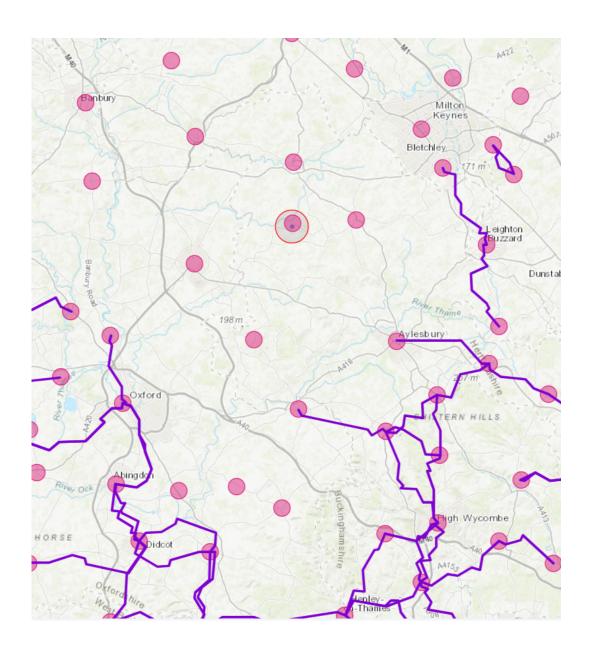
1. What's Slow Ways?- Buckinghamshire

- 13 Slow Ways places / nodes
- 59 Slow Ways
- 75 Routes (some Slow Ways have more than one route option)
- 17 Verified Routes (3+ Positive Reviews)
- 58 Routes with at least one review
- 10 Routes with a least one survey
- 392 Subscribers to Slow Ways newsletter identifiable as being in Bucks



Map of Buckinghamshire Slow Ways

Verified and unverified routes



Map of Buckinghamshire Slow Ways

Verified routes only

Community benefits

- Sharing a positive, empowering, rewarding and inclusive project at a time of national crisis and recovery
- Offering a source of community engagement, focus, |identity||and|| |pride|
- Increasing the use of currently under-used paths thereby keeping them open and valued



Health benefits

- Improving health and wellbeing by encouraging physical activity for short trips and longer journeys. Aligns with Buckinghamshire Simply Walks
- Helping to mitigate the causes and effects of Covid-19, being part of recovery plans, and offering public transport alternatives
- Creating opportunities for people to connect with friends, family and colleagues
- Encouraging people not to rush, connect with nature, and enjoy their journeys supports better mental health.



Environmental benefits

- Reducing pollution and emissions through active travel options as an alternative to carbon-based transport
- Contributing to the decarbonisation of local and national transport systems and helping to address the climate emergency
- Connecting people to 'nearby nature', heritage, places and communities

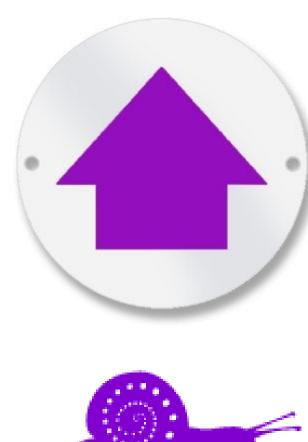


Economic and Transport benefits

- Saving people money by encouraging an inexpensive form of travel
- Spreading economic activity by inspiring visits to, and stays in, more places
- Supporting more people to walk more of the time, for more purposes
- Providing safe, direct and enjoyable routes between neighbouring towns and cities
- Linking active travel to public transport hubs
- Promoting greater use of existing paths, trails, networks, and the connections between them

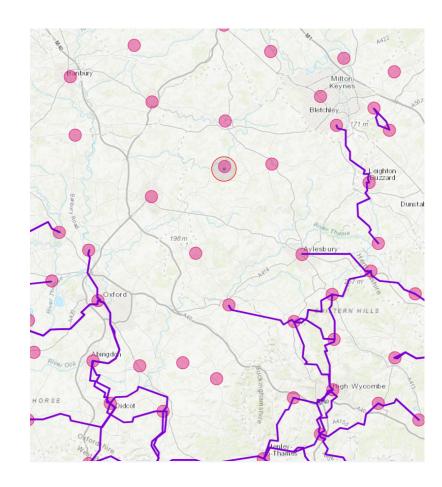


- In a meeting with the Chief Exploration Officer Dan Raven-Ellison in January we discussed Slow Ways' current projects and where a Local Authority partnership might be advantageous
- These included:
 - Identifying a trial route for the UK's first physically waymarked Slow Way.
 - Paper map of Buckinghamshire Slow Ways
 - Health Walks
 - Identifying Rights of Way 'deserts' in an effort to advocate for new ways to access the land
 - Health walks, or opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to experience the countryside.





- Perhaps a more specific, measurable, and achievable target for co-operation would be to achieve a 100% verified network of Slow Ways.
- As of today, no local authority has achieved a 100% completion rate
- Doing so has the potential to bring lots of positive publicity to Buckinghamshire in a year where we have lots to celebrate and showcase for the region.
- May go some way to counter the narrative of excessive infrastructure development in Buckinghamshire with HS2 and EWR permanently altering the landscape and restricting access



- Slow Ways is a collaborative project that relies on the input of volunteers and local communities. By promoting Slow Ways to your memberships, you can encourage them to get involved in the project by contributing their local knowledge and helping to verify potential walking routes
- To verify a route the volunteer needs only to complete a survey sheet on a selected route.
- Training information available on the Slow Ways website
- This includes information on the gradient, surface, obstacles, and ability to complete using a wheelchair or a pushchair.

Grade 1: Entirely smooth and o	ompacted surfaces.							
Grade 2: Mostly smooth and co	empacted surfaces, but the	re may be some loose gravel,	muddy patches of	or cobbles.				
Grade 3: Route includes rough	surfaces that may include :	small boulders, potholes, shal	low ruts, loose gr	avel, short muddy	sections.			
Grade 4: Route includes very ro	ugh surfaces including dee	p ruts, steep loose gravel, un	made paths and o	deep muddy secti	ons. Wheelchair	s may experience	raction/wheel spir	issues.
Grade 5: Route includes techni	cal and arduous terrain whe	ere there may be potentially in	npassable barrier	s if the correct ed	uipment is not	used or barriers wh	ich require assista	nce to over
Access								
Free of stiles				Y/M/N/D				
Free of single steps or kerbs				Y/M/N/D				
Free of flights of steps (flight = two or more steps)				Y/M/N/D				
Free of barriers and other obstacles that could block access for a wheeld		ss for a wheelchair or scoote	r	Y/M/N/D				
What's the narrowest part of th	e path?	cm						
What is the steepest uphill gradient if walking east?		cm						
What is the steepest uphill gradient if walking west?		cm						
What is the steepest camber gradient across the path?		cm						
How clear is waymarking on th	e route?							
Access experience		Access judgement						
Have you successfully completed this route with any of the following?			Relevant experts or professional?					
And would you recommend it t	o someone with the same r	equirements?	Is this route suit	table for someone	with any of the	following?		
Small Pug-sized dog	Y/N/D		Small Pug-sized dog		Y/N/D			
Medium Labrador-sized dog Y / N / D			Medium Labrador-sized dog		Y/N/D			
Large St. Bernard-sized dog Y / N / D			Large St. Bernard-sized dog		Y/N/D			
Standard pushchair Y / N / D			Standard pushchair		Y/N/D			
Off-road rugged pushchair Y / N / D			Off-road rugged pushchair		Y/N/D			
Standard wheelchair Y / N / D			Standard wheelchair		Y/N/D			

Excerpt of a Slow Ways Survey – available in Appendixes

- Opportunities to complete surveys could be found whilst completing other activities – Duke of Edinburgh Award or for Scouting badges.
- Walking Festival-type event
- Internal promotion on intranets or newsletters
- Volunteering days
- Local newspaper / radio appeal
- Very much open to suggestions!



Walking Festival – 'Joe Stuart Spring Time Walk' accessed on Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Website

Any questions, comments, or feedback?

The Local Access Forum's expertise and advice would be greatly appreciated as we decide whether to dedicate time and resource to the promotion of this initiative.

Thank you