

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

The Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum is an independent, statutory advisory body on all matters relating to countryside access, with members representing a wide range of interests including farmers, landowners, walkers, cyclists, equestrians, parish councils, National Trust and those with disabilities.

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

18th October 2021

Dear Michael,

The 2026 cut-off date introduced by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000; and Definitive Map Modification Orders determined by the Planning Inspectorate under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1980.

At the 14th July 2021 meeting of Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum (LAF) members discussed the current situation regarding the 2026 cut-off date for historical evidence to determine Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO's).

In 2015/16 the Buckinghamshire LAF co-ordinated the training of over 100 volunteers to investigate evidence in advance of the 2026 cut-off, but the vast majority were intimidated by the complexity of the process and time commitments, so relatively few applications have materialised. The eventual number of applications submitted before the 2026 cut-off could be insufficient to address the number of valid claims in the county, at least at current rates. With this in mind, we believe the 2026 cut-off should be reviewed with a view to being extended, as we understand the legislation allows.

It also came to light that a DMMO's referred to PINS by Buckinghamshire Council was submitted over 12 months ago, with no indication when it might be addressed. While we are reassured DMMO's submitted to local authorities prior to the 2026 cut-off date will be valid, there is a concern resources at national level may be insufficient to address DMMO's when referred to PINS for a decision.

Byways and bridleways in Buckinghamshire are particularly fragmented and one of the main tools for reconnecting the network for cyclists and equestrians is through the DMMO process. Any delays in the DMMO process lengthens the time the network is disconnected, which is a concern to the LAF.

Some applicants in Buckinghamshire have applied for a Schedule 14 direction from the Secretary of State when no decision has been made by the local authority for over 12 months, but no process is in place for delays at national level. We therefore seek reassurance that resources are in place at PINS to address DMMO cases in the coming years, otherwise there is a risk the public's confidence in the system will be eroded.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Pushman', written in a cursive style.

Richard Pushman (Chairman)