



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Report

AGENDA ITEM 4

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Title: Slow Ways

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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 and directed by the Chief Exploration Officer Daniel Raven-Ellison, the Slow Ways volunteers 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 (see Appendix A & B).

The promotion of walking as a transport mode has significant benefits which are closely aligned with Buckinghamshire Council's key priorities, namely strengthening our communities, protecting the vulnerable, improving our environment, and increasing prosperity.

Community benefits of Slow Ways

Slow Ways is sharing a positive, empowering, rewarding and inclusive project at a time of national crisis and recovery. It offers a source of community engagement, focus, identity and pride. It has the potential to increase the use of currently under-used parts of the PROW network which will lead to improvements through the submission of maintenance requests and reports. Slow Ways connect people to 'nearby nature', heritage, places and communities.

Health benefits of Slow Ways

Slow Ways improve health and wellbeing by encouraging physical activity for short trips and longer journeys. They create 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 of Slow Ways

Slow ways reduce pollution and emissions through active travel options as an alternative to carbon-based transport. They contribute to the decarbonisation of local and national transport systems and helping to address the climate emergency.

Transport benefits of Slow Ways

Slow Ways supporting more people to walk more of the time, for more purposes. In doing so they promote a greater use of existing paths, trails, networks, and the connections between them. They provide safe, direct and enjoyable routes between neighbouring towns and cities. They also serve to link active travel to public transport hubs.

Economic benefits

Slow Ways saving people money by encouraging an inexpensive form of travel and can encourage economic activity by inspiring visits to, and stays in, more places.

On 11th January 2023 I had an initial conversation with Slow Ways to discuss areas in which Buckinghamshire Council and Slow Ways could partner and collaborate, which in the future could involve trialling the country's first waymarked routes, the production of paper maps of local Slow Ways for schools and initiatives such as Health Walks.

At present however the priority for Slow Ways is to walk, review and verify all the routes. Becoming the first county to fully verify their Slow ways network is a specific and achievable goal and could bring positive publicity to the area through local and national which have also been promoting Slow Ways.

To verify a route a volunteer must complete a survey sheet on a selected route (see Appendix D). This includes information on the gradient, surface, obstacles, and ability to complete using a wheelchair or a pushchair. Training information is available on the website (https://beta.slowways.org/Page/how-to#survey_place).

As the Local Access Forum exists to advise Buckinghamshire Council on the improvement of public access to the countryside and public rights of way, I would appreciate the LAF's thoughts on Slow Ways and whether we should promote this organisation.

A map of all the Buckinghamshire Slow Ways and a factsheet have been included as Appendix C.