



## Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum held on Wednesday 19 July 2023 in The Paralympic Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10am and concluding at 11:57am.

### Members present

Mr D Briggs, S Broadbent, Mr G Casperz, Mr A Clark, Mr N Harris, Ms A Heath, R Johnson, Mr G Thomas, A Turner and Mr B Worrell

### Others in attendance

Cllr D Barnes

### Agenda Item

#### 1 **Apologies for Absence**

Members heard apologies from Richard Jennings (Cycling UK), Chris Hurworth (Trail Riders' Fellowship and MPV users) and Melanie Rose (Parish Councils).

#### 2 **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

#### 3 **Matters Arising / Minutes**

A typo was noted in the Chairman's comments on the back page of the report pack. Should read, 'I would like to *thank* the outgoing Chairman...'.  
  
The Minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

#### 4 **Local Transport Plan 5**

Hannah Joyce (Head of Transport Strategy & Funding, Planning, Growth and Sustainability), gave a presentation to the LAF giving an overview of the Local Transport Plan (LTP), which was a statutory requirement of the Transport Act (2000), setting out the long-term priorities for transport across Buckinghamshire. The slides from her presentation would be appended to the Minutes of the meeting.

The LTP was being developed in tandem with the Buckinghamshire Local Plan, which outlined where future housing, retail and commercial units would be located in Buckinghamshire. It was hoped that this approach would create a better LTP, with future developments in mind.

The LTP would be supported by both a 5-10 year implementation plan, outlining what would be delivered through the LTP, with estimated finish dates, and an evidence base informed by feedback from engagement with relevant highways, public transport, planning teams and members.

The Department for Transport (DfT) would provide guidance for the development of the new LTP, facilitating a move away from the 'predict and provide' approach in the current LTP (last updated in 2009) which necessitated forecasting of future traffic and transport requirements based on current usage, and towards a vision led approach, which enabled the LTP to outline what Buckinghamshire Council want Buckinghamshire's transport to look like in the future and how this could be achieved. DfT had made clear that future government funding would be dependent on having an LTP in place, and it remained a key goal to quantifiably reduce carbon emissions as part of the new plan.

It was recognised that the rural nature of large parts of Buckinghamshire meant that car dependency remained high, and this would be accounted for in the LTP. Efforts would be made to mitigate the negative impacts of car travel on communities through targeted investment on congestion hotspots and key corridors, ensuring through-traffic was routed away from residential areas. It was also recognised that social isolation was worsening in rural areas, where those dependent on public transport were affected by underdeveloped links between key social spaces and towns. A lot of time had been spent lobbying to address this issue, and responsive transport systems were being trialled in the High Wycombe and Aylesbury areas, which could be adopted and expanded if they were shown to be effective.

A consultation had been launched to take feedback on the three key objectives for the new LTP, which were as follows:

#### **Connecting Our Economy**

- Minimising congestion
- Delivering faster connections into London/Midlands/Southeast
- Sustainable travel options into town centres and high streets, visitor attractions and leisure facilities, Enterprise Zones and key employment centres.
- Ensure developers forward fund and deliver transport infrastructure.

#### **Decarbonising our Transport System**

- Ensuring that new developments are walkable and cyclable.
- Reducing the need to travel through improved digital connections.
- Improve buses, demand responsive services, taxis, e-scooters and e-bikes services.
- Improve safety for walkers and cyclists over shorter journeys.
- Promote alternative fuels.
- Prepare highway network for climate change impacts.
- Increase biodiversity within the highway network.

### **Building Places for People**

- Keeping traffic away from residential/community areas and high streets.
- Improving traffic flow with optimised traffic signals.
- Exploring policies such as emissions-based parking management.
- Build walking and cycling-friendly neighbourhoods.

The LTP would be supplemented by 'modal specific' documents that would contain more information regarding specific aspects of the plan, such as the Buckinghamshire local cycling/walking plan and the Greenway scheme.

Councillor S Broadbent explained that the LTP had an earlier deadline than the Buckinghamshire Local Plan. Therefore, whilst there was intention to develop the two in tandem, there was forecast to be a point of departure depending on the progress made in finalising the Buckinghamshire Local Plan by the time the LTP was submitted to Government.

Hannah expressed hope that by-passes and link roads would be effective as part of the plan to reduce traffic congestion in town centres.

In response to a question about maintenance costs of footpaths, Councillor S Broadbent confirmed that the cost burden remained high, but was ultimately the responsibility of the highway authority in the case of built footways. £2 million had been budgeted for footpath repairs and an extra £5 million had been used for road resurfacing following last winter. Parish Councils would be able to help where footpaths had become overgrown, and further conversations would be held regarding the maintenance costs of footpaths when the new highway arrangement structure came into effect later in the summer.

Hannah confirmed that the response to the consultation had been good, though 75% of respondents were aged over 55, with the younger generation particularly difficult to reach. The respondents identified decarbonisation as the most important of the key priorities moving forward.

Members thanked Hannah for her time and presentation.

## **5 Chilterns Conservation Board Access Update**

Annette Weiss (Head of Engagements & Partnerships, Chilterns Conservation Board) gave a presentation to the LAF outlining the investment that had been made to improve accessibility in the Chilterns through the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) access funding scheme. The slides would be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

The following key points were raised in her presentation:

Following the allocation of £14 million by DEFRA for countryside accessibility investment in the wake of the 2019 Glover Landscapes Review, £227,000 had been

received by the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) in 2022/23, which was to be used to make, *'...protected landscapes more accessible to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds'*.

Due to time constraints, there had not been the wide-reaching consultation with the public and other bodies as to how the funding could be allocated which the CCB would have hoped to undertake. Therefore, the board worked closely with partners on several accessibility projects which would be detailed to the LAF in her presentation.

It was anticipated that a further £261,480 would be made available to the CCB in 2024/25 for access improvements, which afforded the opportunity to spend time consulting with external groups, invite applications for funding, and explore opportunities to develop a wider strategic approach with collaborative projects across the Chilterns. A 'Widening the Welcome' workshop was scheduled to take place on 25th September to gather ideas with stakeholders and discuss opportunities to this end.

The projects funded with the 2022/23 funding included:

- New mobility vehicles at the Centre for Outdoor Accessibility Training, Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve.
- A seven-seater electric vehicle for the Chiltern Rangers to transport conservation volunteers with dementia, limited mobility, and other restrictions.
- Funding for the Bucks disability service to do accessibility and inclusivity surveys, at popular countryside sites including Brush Hill Nature Reserve, White Hill Nature Reserve, Captain's Wood, and Ashton Rowan Nature Reserve.
- Contribution to resurfacing and accessibility improvements on the Wendover Canal towpath.
- The development of an augmented reality app at three hillfort sites in the Chilterns.
- The installation of a new Disabled toilet in the Chiltern Open Air Museum.

Some initial improvements had also been made to the Chess Valley Walk, and a survey had been conducted to identify areas for further improvement over the next three to five years.

Annette invited feedback on the presentation, and for anyone to submit ideas for future projects that may improve accessibility following the meeting.

David Briggs explained that he had felt it necessary to fence off the footpath for the part of the Chess Valley Walk that crossed his land, due to uncontrolled dog attacks on his livestock, and ramblers straying from the footpath. He was also concerned that the increase in footfall he had noticed along the route post-covid posed a risk to the surface quality of the footpath, which threatened to become muddier and

require increased maintenance.

Annette confirmed that she was aware of the issues raised, and that funding was available through the Chess Valley Smarter Water Catchment initiative to mitigate the problem. A survey had been conducted by Sustrans to identify long term solutions, including the possibility of a more robust hardstanding surface for the footpath in the future. Efforts were also being made to reduce pressure on the Chess Valley route by promoting alternative circular walks going up and around the Chiltern hills.

Members thanked Annette for her time and presentation, and would be in touch to submit suggestions for future accessibility projects in due course.

## **6 Disabled Ramblers Access Surveys**

James Spratley (Strategic Access Officer) gave a presentation to the LAF outlining the recent work of the Ridgeway Google Street View Project. The slides from the presentation would be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

The following key points were raised in his presentation:

Disabled Ramblers had received National Lottery funding to purchase two GoPro Max 360° cameras, which would be used to photograph the entire Ridgeway National Trail from Avebury to Ivinghoe Beacon for its 50th Anniversary. These photographs would then be uploaded to Google Street View, and could be used by those with disabilities to make an informed assessment as to the viability of the route based on their needs and abilities. This formed part of a wider effort to improve accessibility into the countryside.

Some priority areas had been identified, including:

- Whiteleaf Car Park to top of Whiteleaf Hill
- Trail from top of Coombe Hill down through Goodmerhill Wood to Buckmoorend farm shop
- Coombe Hill to Low scrubs National Trust Car Park
- Wendover to Coombe Hill
- Pitstone to Ivinghoe Beacon

Once submitted, Google would automatically blur any faces and vehicle registration plates to ensure compliance with GDPR. It was anticipated that there could be up to a week's delay before the submitted photos appeared on Google Maps.

James showed photographs of a trial run that he undertook with Gavin Casperz. The trial went well, and some minor problems had been identified as a result, which would be addressed before the full project got underway.

It was hoped that the images would be made available for download and use in tandem with other navigational apps such as 'Go Outdoors', or the step free routes, which were discussed at the previous meeting of the LAF.

Following questions, these points were made:

James clarified that he hoped to conduct a complete survey of the Ridgeway using the technology at different times of the year, which could then be viewed on Google Maps to reflect the different challenges that may occur along the route in different seasons.

People could request that images including their property or themselves be removed from the sequence of photographs displayed on Google Maps. However, the quality of the photographs produced by the cameras was good enough that the previous or subsequent image in the sequence would likely be sufficient to display the landscape in those instances.

The ease with which people can independently survey a route and upload to Google Maps would make it unnecessary to hire Google or their equipment to do it on behalf of anyone.

Members thanked James for his presentation.

## **7 Rights of Way Group Update**

Jon Clark (Senior Strategic Access Officer) and James Spratley (Strategic Access Officer) gave an overview of the attached report, which was circulated with the agenda reports pack and made the following comments:

Future public rights of way closures due to ongoing HS2 construction would be advertised with the help of QR code technology that would accompany the traditional signs currently in use. This would enable those using the right of way to access the latest information on the HS2 website and reduce the need to so frequently replace all the physical signage along the affected route. In addition to the QR code, the new signs would feature a larger area map showing the current closure in relation to the sign, as well as information on the next closure both north and south of the primary one detailed on the sign.

The Donate-a-Gate scheme was now back up and running with a new volunteer from the Chiltern Society.

The Rights of Way Operations team was short staffed due to two resignations and one Rights of Way Officer taking time off work for their honeymoon. Joanne Taylor requested patience from the LAF in progressing through their work until new staff could be recruited.

Claire Hudson (Definitive Map and Highway Searches Team Leader) confirmed that the backlog of 48 Applications for Definitive Map modification Orders was caused in part due to the nature of the work and the time taken to assess each application, as well as the lack of staff that would be required to process that many applications within 'reasonable' time. It was suggested that to help the LAF visualise the progress

being made on the backlog, a rough timetable could be included in future updates and reports, though with the caveat that those estimated times remained variable. This was agreeable to members.

## **8 LAF Members' Report**

Jon Clark confirmed that a card was posted to former LAF Chairman, Richard Pushman in April 2023 to thank him for his work with the LAF.

Brian Worrell had attended the last Ridgeway Board meeting at Bury Down, West Ilsley, Oxfordshire.

Natural England had contacted the LAF announcing a proposed online support and information sharing system between LAFs via Sharepoint, with further information to follow.

The Buckinghamshire LAF Annual Report was ready for publication to the website. Members agreed to its publication.

## **9 Any Other Business**

It was agreed to consider including a standing item on East-West Rail at all subsequent LAF meetings.

## **10 Date of the Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting date was 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023.