



## Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum held on Wednesday 10 July 2024 in The Paralympic Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.30 am.

### Members present

Mr N Harris, Mr G Casperz, Mr A Clark, K Haining, Mr R Jennings, R Johnson, Mr G Thomas, Councillor A Turner and Mr B Worrell

### Others in attendance

Mr J Clark, Mr J Spratley, Mr T Goldsmith and Mr L Ashton

### Agenda Item

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

Apologies had been received from Chris Hurworth, David Briggs, Helen Francis, Councillor Steve Broadbent and Claire Hudson.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

A suggestion was made for a hard copy agenda to be posted to members of the LAF upon request.

#### **3 Minutes of the Last Meeting/Matters Arising**

A Member highlighted that under agenda item 5 - Active Travel and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP), it had been said at the previous meeting that bridleways should not be entirely tarmacked. This had not been noted within the minutes.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024 be agreed as a correct record subject to the above amendment.

#### **4 LAF visit to Centre for Outdoor Accessibility Training, Aston Rowant**

Members of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum (LAF) along with Council colleagues made a visit to the Centre for Outdoor Accessibility Training (COAT), where they observed a variety of gates and mobility aids designed for those working

in rural areas.

Members of the LAF gained understanding of the benefits of choosing less restrictive access options, discussed the pros and cons of RADAR locks, and examined maintenance and design aspects of various gate styles. Demonstrations included the operation of the Tramper mobility scooter, and the horse step over stile.

Efforts were being considered to document the gates through Google Street View to enhance the theoretical knowledge obtained from classroom instruction on laws and accessibility. Furthermore, there was eager anticipation for innovative gate designs soon to be launched, which promised to push the envelope in terms of accessibility options.

The LAF thanked James Spratley for organising the visit.

## **5 Creating New Rights of Way**

The LAF considered the report which outlined possible opportunities to create new rights of way in areas where Buckinghamshire Council was the freehold landowner including:

- A bridleway across Wapsey's Wood. Previously a landfill site, the location was undergoing a restoration scheme for which negotiations were ongoing. Discussion focused on maintaining access in line with a Section 106 agreement and the creation of the public bridleway. It was noted that the restoration plan's focus on public access had diminished compared to previous versions, and did not account for the Section 106 agreement, raising concerns about the way it would be fulfilled.
- Wing Parish Council's suggestion for a new footpath across the Long Spinney. Discussion highlighted the maintenance of the site by keen volunteers, and its use by a forestry school. Any new footpath route would be considered with the knowledge that boggy land was more prominent towards the south of the site, and Forestry England had permission to continue planting on the site, which would also expand to include a nearby community orchard.
- Accessibility for Duck Alley in Chesham, which was not recorded as a right of way. The area is part of two promoted routes and was under consideration for promotion as a disabled access route. Discussion concerned the complexity of the project, as it involved multiple landowners. The town Council was supportive of the idea, but negotiations with landowners had not commenced. It was noted that an initial collaborative, informal approach towards the landowners was preferable, and wider community support might be helpful as part of this. There was also concern raised around utility works having started for the neighbouring development where it was understood an initial pre-planning application had been refused. It was noted that there was 360 degrees camera footage, which meant any encroachment from the development could be identified. The status of the planning application would be checked.

**Action: Jonathan Clark, Senior Strategic Access Officer**

- An existing permissive path in Rodger's Wood which was maintained by volunteers, although it was not clear whom these volunteers were. Discussion concerned the opportunity to extend an existing dead-end footpath on site to create a circular walk by linking it to other routes.

Members concluded that the Wapsey's Wood and Rodger's Wood projects would be prioritised due to their relative simplicity. It was agreed that the other proposals, particularly Duck Alley, would be reconsidered closer to the November LAF meeting.

**6 Black Park Streetview Recording**

The Strategic Access Officer met with the Head of Country Parks to film the trails and paths at Black Park County Park with a GoPro camera to be uploaded to Google Streetview.

A Kawasaki Mule ATV, four-wheel drive vehicle was provided to cover more ground and the Head of Country Parks had expressed interest in using the GoPro technology for promoting other Country Parks in Buckinghamshire.

The survey captured about 11 miles of the park in under 2 hours, including the majority of trails and routes, the Park Run route, and the new Changing Places facility, which offered greater accessibility for paraplegics or those suffering from spinal injuries. The captured footage would be uploaded to Google Streetview and it was hoped that it could be used to help attract potential visitors and showcase the park's accessibility and amenities.

Discussions were being held to expand the project to other areas, and cover more rights of way to enable people to make informed decisions about particular routes and their accessibility according to individual need.

The LAF suggested further priority routes and places in the county that could promote disabled access or help with visitor planning including Coombe Hill, Hughenden and the Wendover to Missenden Cycleway. The possibility of including the Whiteleaf Cross to Pulpit Hill walking route was also discussed, due to the tendency for parts of the route to be flooded, which had limited accessibility in the past.

It was agreeable to members that any further ideas for routes or places to be included in the project moving forward should be relayed to the Senior Strategic Access Officer or Strategic Access Officer.

**7 Rights of Way Group Update**

Members discussed the process by which evidence was collected for DMMO applications, particularly from elderly residents who may not live long enough to

give evidence by the time applications were considered. It was confirmed that a process was in place to prioritize such cases, but there was a need to balance this with avoiding queue jumping. This included filling out a form and possibly conducting interviews to cross-check the information provided. There was a concern about ensuring the authenticity of the evidence, as some interviewees seemed unsure of what to say. It was agreed to clarify the policy on prioritisation and circulate a copy to LAF members.

**Action: Tom Goldsmith, Definitive Map Officer**

#### DMMOs

It was confirmed that the interviews had been conducted in relation to the application in Chesham to add various routes south of Nashleigh Hill to the Definitive Map connecting with Public Footpath nos. 117, 37 and 67. The historic research would begin over the next two weeks.

It was confirmed that the papers relating to the Bledlow-cum-Saunderton (North Mill Road) investigation clarifying the status of the disputed route were with the legal team for checking.

The diversion of footpath No. 14 in Chalfont St. Peter had been approved by PINs following a public hearing at the end of June.

The Village Green application off Warren Wood Drive in High Wycombe would be determined on 12<sup>th</sup> July.

#### Strategic Access

The majority of rights of way in the county would remain closed until at least April 2026 due to HS2 construction, affecting local accessibility and causing significant inconvenience. This included the closure of Small Dean Lane in Wendover, despite assurances from the Secretary of State that it would remain open, even during HS2 construction.

There were concerns about the condition of the long-closed footpaths up to HS2 boundaries once they reopened in 2026, as overgrown, woody vegetation and lack of maintenance could create significant financial and logistical challenges. Members suggested estimating and documenting costs for future reinstatement in the absence of ongoing maintenance.

It was agreeable to members to explore the possibility of replicating the hand back process used with East West Rail to ensure footpaths are in acceptable condition before being reopened, despite the lack of legal recourse.

Members discussed a proposal to install four gates on the Wendover bridleway no.14, which was intersected by HS2 works and an access track, and concerns about the safety and practicality of this for horse riders, who may find it difficult to dismount and navigate multiple gates safely. The proponents argued that the four gates created a safe island in the middle of the bridleway, allowing riders to shelter

if there is traffic on both sides. The Senior Strategic Access Officer commented that, in his view, fewer gates would expedite crossing and improve safety, as managing multiple gates can be cumbersome and risky for horse riders. He was happy to visit the site if this was desirable.

Officers attended a meeting about the financial burden of school transport on the Council, which included some of the walking routes to school being deemed unsafe. One such route in Great Missenden had become overgrown and slippery, making it dangerous for children. The Council lacks funding to address this, however the Chiltern Society was helping by clearing the path to improve safety.

Following a planning inspector's decision to approve the expansion of HMP Grendon, the team were liaising with the planning team and the prison estate to look at two required s257 TCPA 1990 diversions [Footpath EDG/16/1]. The LAF would be kept abreast of any developments.

Two hand backs remained on the East West Rail project. Swanbourne no.17, the crossing by Moco Farm, had been inspected and improved with a new ramp, and the legal processes were being finalized. Mursley Restricted Byway No. 18 had been inspected twice by officers to secure an improvement to the width post-construction. There would be an effort to ensure these changes are recorded onto the definitive map.

The importance of accurately recording changes in the width of rights of way, like the Mursley Restricted Byway, on the definitive map was confirmed to members. This was crucial to avoid legal disputes in the future. There's a specific mention of securing an agreement to a width of 7 meters for Mursley Restricted Byway No. 18, which would be reflected in the definitive map description for that route. **Members asked if specific widths had been recorded in the EWR diversions.**

**Action: James Spratley, Strategic Access Officer**

### Operations

The vacant Area Rights of Way Officer position had been filled by the former Assistant Rights of Way Officer for the South. The Area Right of Way Officer for the south-western area was on maternity leave. Permission had not been granted to recruit for the maternity cover, but all Issues and cases for the area would be progressed and managed as far as possible by the team.

Work to replace the mid-section of Berry Hill Footbridge on footpath no. 12 Taplow had been completed. The next bridge along needed to be closed due to safety concerns. A list of all outstanding capital projects had been circulated as part of the agenda reports pack, and members were invited to contact the Senior Strategic Access Officer with their thoughts about prioritisation of these projects.

A suggestion was made to engage local communities through crowdfunding initiatives like GoFundMe to fund work on capital projects which the Council could not fund.

The Senior Strategic Access Officer confirmed that he would seek clarity on funding issues impacting the likelihood of the Council being unable to reopen rights of way that had been closed due to adverse weather making them dangerous.

**Action: Jonathan Clark, Senior Strategic Sites Officer**

A question was asked about the increasing number of cases on the Rights of Way CAMs database, and the possibility of increasing staffing and/or the budget to address this. It was confirmed that when the data was rationalised, it was common to find multiple cases listed for the same site, so the number of cases did not always paint an accurate picture of the number of sites in need of maintenance. It was a case of rationalising the data to get an accurate understanding of the outstanding work to be done. Whilst the LAF always lobbied to maintain and increase its budget, the request to increase it was probably better made from the user groups to the Council, not from the user groups to the officers. A question was asked about the capacity of the Rights of Way team to handle the spreadsheet updates, where the area secretaries had cleared old issues on the CAMS database. It was suggested that if lists of resolved issues were provided by the area secretaries, updating the database should be straightforward. The idea of training volunteers to update CAMS, as done by other councils, was mentioned, **although the Council was not quite at that stage yet.**

## **8 Dates & Venue of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at 10 a.m. in the Paralympic Room, The Gateway offices, Aylesbury