

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD IN THE DINTON ACTIVITIES CENTRE, DINTON PASTURES COUNTRY PARK, HURST ON WEDNESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2015

Present: Dr Janice Bridger (Chair), Mrs Helena Barker, Mrs Liz Connolly, Mrs Jan Heard, Mr Barry Lambert, Mr Chris Marriage, Mr David Mills, Mr Robert O'Neill, Mrs Margaret Pawson, Councillor Angus Ross, Mr Graham Smith,

In Attendance: Ms Elaine Cox (West Berkshire Council), Ms Natalie Lucas (Reading Borough Council, part time), Ms Rebecca Walkley (Wokingham Borough Council), Mr John Walmsley (Secretary)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Anthony Chadley, Mr Colin Patient, Mr Patrick Todd,

Not Present: Mrs Sally Wallington, Councillor Keith Chopping, Councillor Tony Page

Observers: Mr Ray Clayton, Ms Nicola Greenwood (BHS), Mr James Stevenson (BBOWT), Ms Caroline Robson (Canal and River Trust)

1 & 4 INTRODUCTIONS AND PARTICIPATION

John Walmsley was introduced as the new Secretary. The Forum recorded its grateful thanks to Roger Penfold, the previous Secretary, and his assistant Linda Fothergill.

Observers listed above were welcomed to the meeting.

18 MEMBERSHIP AND RECRUITMENT

The membership profile for the next 1.5 years was reviewed, taking into account the 3 year terms. This showed a need for a suitable combination of extensions of existing members who are willing to continue, together with recruitment of new members, particularly from the landowner/landholder category.

Ask all existing members who have come to the end of their 3 year terms, and those due to retire by end April 2016, if they wish to continue. Pass this information to Appointing Authorities (AAs) with a request for them to consider extensions.	Secretary
Agree recruitment process with Appointing Authorities (AAs) and Chair	Secretary
Agree advertising channels with AAs and Chair. As per previous meeting and suggestions these will include Country Land and Business Association (CLA), National Farmers Union (NFU), Newbury & District Agricultural Society.	Secretary
Launch recruitment drive in early 2016	Secretary

2 MINUTES OF MAY 2015 MEETING

Numbering in italics below refers to the numbering used in the May 2015 minutes.

Site Visit: Graham Smith had attended the pre-meeting site visit, but was not listed in the minutes

29: Membership of the Forum: Patrick Todd had sent details of CLA South East E-News to the chair who has passed them onto John Walmsley for future use.

30: Wokingham rights of way: the future of the Wokingham Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) to be discussed under agenda item 7 of the present (November 2015) minutes.

40: John Walmsley had contacted the Canal & River Trust (CRT) and a representative was present as an observer at the present meeting.

46: Reading Rights of Way Improvement Plan: to be considered at the meeting after the present meeting.

51: Comments on planning applications

- West Berkshire Council: Application 14/02642/FUL, Grundon quarry, Chieveley. Elaine Cox was not able to supply any new information on re-instatement or diversion of the byway.*
- Wokingham Borough Council: application F/2014/2119, Bearwood Golf Club, Mole Rd, Sindlesham: Rebecca Walkley reported that a feasibility study for the provision of a traffic-controlled crossing had been set up.*

53: West Berkshire Rights of Way: a repair list with costs had not been received. Quotations were still being obtained

57: Wokingham Borough Council - equestrian advice. The Forum's advice had been sent to the Council and an acknowledgement received

58: M4 Junctions 3-4 Smart Motorway: Jan Heard has been in contact with the relevant people at Highways England - see current minutes below.

7: Membership of the forum: dealt with in current (Nov 2015) minutes below

9: Working groups: The nature and membership of the working groups is to be reviewed in May 2016. The future of the Wokingham ROWIP to be reviewed - see agenda item 7 of current minutes. For Snelsmore Common issues see current minutes items 8, 9, 14.

10: West Berkshire Council work to tackle vehicle problems: No action reported by Elaine Cox on setting aside areas for vehicular use or use of enforcement cameras.

11: West Berkshire Council's Rights Of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) case programme; the 'Prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and path orders' is still awaited.

12: Adoption of annual report: the report had been written, circulated to Forum members, sent to Natural England, and was on Huddle.

15: Stewardship permissive access and dealing with national issues: Janice Bridger had informed the South Lincs & Rutland Forum of the general support of Mid & West Berks LAF for the consultations. Forum members had not indicated that they had approached any further landowners about continuation of the Stewardship Schemes after the expiry period. See also item 12 of November 2015 minutes.

16: Management of the ridgeway: Graham Smith had not attended the Ridgeway Forum meeting on 20th October as it had been aimed at tourism businesses.

3 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

The following members declared an interest in connection with some of the LAF business transacted later in the meeting:

- Chris Marriage, Graham Smith, Helena Barker: all members of Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).
- Helena is also Chair of Newbury and Thatcham Green Gym which does work for BBOWT.

Although not a member of the LAF, in the interests of transparency the new Secretary also declared membership of various organisations: British Mountaineering Council (BMC), British Orienteering, Austrian Alpine Club, Fell Runners Association, BBOWT, John Muir Trust, Cairngorms Campaign.

5 M4 SMART MOTORWAY

Members were presented with a written report by Jan Heard which was NOTED.

Rebecca Walkley added that Wokingham BC had talked to Highways England (HE), but there was no room for improvements requested by Wokingham. However others e.g. Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead who may still be able to get improvements in their areas. HE plan to address noise levels by suitable surfacing.

Jan advised that there was to be another hearing in December. She was concerned about noise barriers being put up on only one side of the motorway as this might actually increase noise on the opposite side, even if there was no noise increase overall which was the HE design aim. Jan suggested that Wokingham BC should monitor current noise levels so as to have a baseline to compare against when the works are complete.

Rebecca Walkley volunteered to organise a meeting with Wokingham Planning and Highways departments, to include Jan. The aim would be to make representations to HE before the next deadline, should the meeting deem that to be appropriate.	Rebecca Walkley
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6 WEST BERKS ROWIP

The West Berks ROWIP subgroup proposed acceptance of the report submitted to the May meeting by Elaine Cox on progress and priorities. Elaine Cox also gave a verbal update on the ROWIP.

A copy of the West Berks 'Prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and path orders' should be circulated to members	Elaine Cox
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Elaine also reported that £100K had been budgeted to repair flood damaged PROW from the winter before last.

Elaine asked if anyone knew of further locations affected by flood damage.	All
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7 WOKINGHAM ROWIP

Rebecca Walkley gave a presentation on the Greenways Project. A sample of "Flexipave" was passed around, which is suitable for walkers, cyclists & horse riders, and may be used on the project. Flexipave has already been successfully used on the Transpennine Bridleway and other sites. This triggered a short discussion on conflicts between different types of users on shared routes, and whether such problems were significant or just perceived. Angus Ross said that it was very early days for the project but Wokingham BC would be liaising with local riding groups, carriage drivers etc. Caroline Robson said that the Canal and River Trust (CRT) did sometimes have conflict issues on canal towpaths, e.g. cyclists trying to set new fastest times on Strava <https://www.strava.com/> CRT tries to promote awareness and good behaviour ("Share the space, drop your pace" campaign <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/our-towpath-code>). Janice Bridger mentioned published research on perceived conflict.

Jan Heard stated that there was a lot of good work going into Greenways, but was concerned that work planned in the ROWIP may not be getting much attention as a result. Janice Bridger pointed out that the Wokingham ROWIP working group currently had no convenor, but was an appropriate place to deal with such concerns. Jan accordingly agreed to take on the role of convenor for this working group.

8 BBOWT ACCESS AUDITS OF WEST BERKS COMMONS AND OPEN SPACES

Members were presented with a written report by Janice Bridger, including material from James Stevenson of BBOWT.

Action Points from the report were dealt with as follows:

- B1 The Forum welcomed the 7 Access Audits undertaken so far by James Stevenson of BBOWT.
- B2 The Forum was unanimous that in requesting a regular updates from BBOWT, particularly as BBOWT's work under the management agreement with West Berks Council is now so far reaching.
- B3 A LAF site visit to Snelsmore Common will be organised in conjunction with a LAF meeting in Spring 2016. James Stevenson's presence is requested in order to maximise the value from the visit.

It was agreed a letter should be sent to BBOWT in recognition of the very good work on access done to date, and to encourage this to continue.	Janice Bridger
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9 WEST BERKS COMMONS - REPORTS ON COMMONS ADVISORY GROUPS

Written reports on Advisory Group Meetings were presented for Snelsmore Common (Janice Bridger), Greenham and Crookham Commons (Janice Bridger), Wokefield Common (Margaret Pawson), and Padworth Common (Graham Smith). These reports were all NOTED.

Margaret Pawson also commented that good progress has been made at Wokefield Common, where 2 easy access routes are planned, suitable for pushchairs and mobility scooters. The work will be relatively low cost. These proposals were achieved after an extra meeting on 27th August when BBOWT, West Berks Council & the Committee ironed out a number of problems.

Chris Marriage gave a verbal report on the Bucklebury Common Advisory Group, with the following points:

- A 4x4 had got stuck recently whilst accessing the common illegally, and police had been called.
- Repair work had been done on the Ramsbury Corner Byway, but barriers have now been removed and the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) has expired, leading to the possibility that the Byway would get damaged again and the money spent might therefore be wasted. He asked if the TRO could be extended through the winter period when the risk was greatest, an action that Bucklebury locals would support. Janice Bridger mentioned that she had received an email from the local resident who alerted the Forum to the damage on Bucklebury Common, and thanking the Forum in its help in achieving these repairs.
- Chris also asked if the TRO had covered motorcycle use, and whether this could be included in an extension.

Elaine Cox agreed that a TRO extension (or new TRO) would be desirable, and will investigate what can be done.	Elaine Cox
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10 CONTACT WITH BLNP, LEP, AND H&WB BOARDS

Angus Ross reported verbally as follows.

Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (BLNP). The original country-wide funding for Nature Partnerships has dried up. BLNP works in cooperation with BBOWT.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Local councils are represented on LEPs, and there is often some kind of link to Health and Wellbeing Boards. Should the LAF liaise with LEPs? This was left as an open question. Sometimes they have money to undertake access projects, and it would be useful to know when this is the case. However Angus had no specific contacts at LEPs.

Angus stated that today's children were the first generation to have a lower life expectancy than their parents, due to obesity and low levels of exercise.

Elaine Cox will give a report on promoting access and exercise for health at the next meeting to be held in West Berks.	Elaine Cox
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11 CROSS-BOUNDARY LIAISON

Written reports were presented as follows:

- Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (Janice Bridger)
- SE LAF Chairs Meeting (Janice Bridger)
- LAF Chairs Meeting (Janice Bridger)
- Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum (Graham Smith)

The reports were NOTED.

Janice also commented that the Hampshire LAF were concerned with lack of cross-boundary contact.

Chris Marriage gave a verbal report from attending the Oxfordshire LAF. He made the following points:

- The LTP for the county makes surprisingly little reference to the ROWIP.
- The Ridgeway Partnership is hosted by Oxfordshire County Council.
- Oxon LAF have decided they should attend Gloucester and Bucks LAFs, but oddly not Mid and West Berks LAF

Graham Smith advised that the Wiltshire LAF meetings show that the Green Lane Association (GLASS) and Land Access & Recreation Association (LARA) were actively pursuing the issue of "white roads" on which it is often difficult to determine access rights. The next Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum meeting is 17th Feb 2016.

Janice Bridger and Colin Patient had also attended the Windsor & Maidenhead LAF.

12 LAF RESPONSE TO CONSULTATIONS

Janice Bridger presented a written report containing draft responses to the two consultations from the South Lincs & Rutland LAF on 'Permissive access' and 'Making our needs known', The aim was to finalise the responses and send them back.

It was noted that permissive access was unfortunately no longer part of the DEFRA stewardship schemes.

Helena Barker felt that there were some leading questions in the consultations, but she was content with it overall.

Members are asked to provide any further comments on the consultations by 18 th December 2015. After that date the response will be sent to South Lincs & Rutland LAF.	All
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A discussion took place on how LAFs might collaborate to lobby government. There is evidence that many LAFs may have similar issues, but are not acting in concert.

13 SOLAR FARMS

Janice Bridger had submitted a written report, based on Sally Wallington's question as to whether the Forum should have a policy on this subject, and some research by Helena Barker into planning applications for such installations elsewhere.

Elaine Cox had objected to the Pang Valley solar farm on the grounds that a bridleway is to be used for construction traffic.

Janice Bridger proposed that the LAF did not need a policy for solar farms in general, but instead should monitor applications for them, and consider each on its merits e.g. impact on views, impact on Public Rights of Way (PROW), whether a PROW improvement could offset adverse impacts, and so on. The Forum resolved to adopt this approach.

14 REPORT FROM LAF WORKING GROUPS

New Access Working Group. A discussion was held, mainly to progress new access topics that had arisen in previous meetings.

Snelsmore Common. Elaine Cox reported that West Berks Council will do the vegetation clearance previously discussed. Illegal encroachment onto the common would be more difficult to tackle but legal action may be taken against the offenders. It was noticeable that in the recent consultation about a new bridleway link, the encroachers had not responded.

Greenham Common. James Stevenson and Simon Barnett are going to look at encroachments at Greenham.

Advise the outcome of the encroachment survey when known	James Stevenson
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Hampstead Norreys railway line. In a previous report it had been said that there were only a few minor problems to be dealt with. However Elaine Cox said that she hadn't been able to get an update from the West Berks Planning department in time for the meeting.

Elaine to give an update on the Hampstead Norreys railway line when possible.	Elaine Cox
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Elaine also said that there was about £10K left of s106 money, and she had suggested that it go towards the railway line project.

Chris Marriage said that there was another railway line in the Long Lane area near Newbury. He suggested that this should be looked at, in conjunction with SPOKES as another possible new route.

15 PUBLIC OUTREACH

John Walmsley gave a brief introduction to how internet based methods might be employed to make the work of the LAF more accessible to the public, and suggested that a website and a Facebook account would be useful.

Circulate material on advantages/disadvantages of using a website and social media. Invite members to comment/debate (by email), with the aim to make a decision at a future meeting.	Secretary
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16 PLANNING

A report had been submitted by Janice Bridger on 3 planning applications since the last meeting. After consultation with Forum members by email, the Forum sent responses in respect of:

- **Sagecroft Rd, Thatcham, West Berks:** a proposal to dispose of a very small area of open space. Forum response: No objection as long as enough space left for bus stop & street furniture.
- **Buckham Hill, Chaddleworth, West Berks:** (Received from West Berks Legal Services). A proposal to extinguish an old section of highway (left when the highway was straightened) and short section of bridleway. The Forum proposed that a 'behind the hedge/fence' bridleway was substituted for the existing highway and bridleway thus providing an off-road link between a bridleway and minor road. No comment received back to date.
- **The Control Tower, Greenham Common, West Berks:** a planning application for use of the Control Tower as a visitor centre. The Forum supported the use of the Control Tower in May 2014 after a site visit. Outcome: The planning committee went against officer recommendation and supported the application.

There were no further comments on the responses by members of the Forum, and the report was duly NOTED.

17 HORIZON SCANNING

Elaine Cox explained that Horizon Scanning was intended to be for subjects that were coming up in the long term, and which might require some lateral thinking. She suggested adding climate change as a subject for further consideration.

Add climate change to Horizon Scan list, as a possible topic for a future meeting	Secretary
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19 LAF WORK PROGRAMME

Various topics were suggested for inclusion in future meetings.

Add all the items below to the Work Programme, for possible inclusion in future meetings.	Secretary
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- Potential planning issues were flagged up for:
 - development planned near the Coppid Beach roundabout
 - North Newbury development: the Forum has previously commented with respect to the footpath running through the site
- Consequences of the Deregulation Act is a topic that should be considered by the Forum, as and when the associated Statutory Regulations are issued (probably April 2016).
- A presentation and/or dialogue with the Canal and River Trust was suggested to identify areas of common interest
- A presentation from Treadlightly
- A review of LAF working groups should take place, for relevance, membership, and workload when new Forum members are recruited.
- Reading ROWIP review

James Stevenson also stated that he can give advance notice of BBOWT projects under consideration. This would be helpful to the Forum.

20 CHANGE OF LAF HOST

The change of host from Reading Borough Council to West Berks Council was still in progress. John Walmsley outlined the basis of the agreement that the 3 Appointing Authorities are intending to reach to cover the LAF running costs. The only practical effect on members should be that future expense claims will be submitted to West Berks Council (via the Secretary), and in accordance with the West Berks expenses process.

Circulate new expense claims forms, rates and process information.	Secretary & Elaine Cox
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21 TRAINING FOR LAF MEMBERS

Janice Bridger had submitted a written report seeking to determine whether Forum members & future new forum members require or would like training in matters relating to the business of local access forums (e.g. rights of way), and if so what the source of funding might be.

A number of members indicated that they would find PROW and countryside access training useful, and ideally it should be available to LAFs nationally. Barry Lambert stated that a new acronyms list would help understand some of the jargon. Several people would like a short “essentials” type information booklet for reference.

Some useful existing resources were identified:

- 19 leaflets on the British Horse Society (BHS) website
- Explanatory information on the Ramblers website

Janice to feed back to Jonathan Clark, the South East LAF co-ordinator / ex-co-ordinator.	Janice Bridger
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22 FUTURE MEETINGS

As the normal schedule of meetings had got out of synch in 2015, Janice Bridger offered 3 options for 2016/2017.

It was resolved to have 3 meetings in 2016, but use the first meeting in a different way to normal:

- 24/2/16 (Reading) - Special topics meeting e.g. Canal & River Trust, Treadlightly, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (subjects to be confirmed);
- 18/5/16 (West Berks) - normal LAF meeting format;
- 21/9/16 (Wokingham) - normal LAF meeting format;
- 25/1/17 (Reading) - normal LAF meeting format

23 AOB

Bob O'Neill was concerned that many planning applications do not come to the Forum. Janice Bridger explained that this was because LAFs are not Statutory Consultees. Elaine Cox stated that officers from the Appointing Authorities can and do help with identifying relevant applications to the Forum.

Produce a report to clarify the issue, and propose a solution.	Bob O'Neill
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Jan Heard mentioned Neighbourhood Plans as one possible way of identifying forthcoming planning issues.

West Berks Council has issued its list for development sites. The Forum decided that it did not want to comment formally on the list as a whole, but would continue to consider individual planning applications on their merits.

A National LAF Conference is to be held in Bristol on 23rd Feb 2016.

Electronic copies of agenda reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting. However Barry Lambert queried the absence of distribution of paper copies. The following members requested paper copies for future meetings: Janice Bridger, Barry Lambert, Chris Marriage, Margaret Pawson, Jan Heard.

In the process of discussing agenda item 12 above, the meeting had paused to take in a verbal report from Margaret Pawson on the latest Rights of Way Review Committee. Key concerns were:

- The fact that ROWIPs do not have to be implemented is an issue, and as a consequence much of the potential benefit of them may be lost.
- Natural England do not seem concerned about PROW, on the basis that “everyone has a LAF”.
- Ministers say that PROW are very important, but there is little practical support available from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) or Natural England (NE).