

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES,
BRIDGE STREET, READING, ON WEDNESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2015
COMMENCING AT 2 PM AND CONCLUDED AT 5.10 PM

Present: Dr J C Bridger (Chairman), Mrs H M Barker, Mrs L Connolly, Mrs J Heard, Mr B Lambert, Mr C N B Marriage, Mr R O'Neill, Mr C Patient, Mrs M Pawson, Councillor A Ross, Mr G V Smith, Mr P D G Todd

In Attendance: Ms E Cox (West Berkshire Council), Mrs L Fothergill (Assisting the Secretary), Ms N Lucas (Reading Borough Council), R F Penfold (Secretary), Ms R Walkley (Wokingham Borough Council)

Apologies for Absence: Mr S Brook, Mr D Mills, Councillor T Page, Mr R R Sharp, Mr A Thomas, Councillor Dr T Vickers

2 Members of the Public were present

41 SITE VISIT

A visit had been arranged for Members to view the proposed sites for The Heights Free School in Caversham (see Minute 48) prior to the meeting. One Member, already familiar with the sites, attended.

42 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 24 September 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

43 MATTERS ARISING ON THE MINUTES

24 Site Visit

Cllr A Ross announced that the Adventure Play Area at Dinton Pastures, which had been visited by Members of the Forum prior to the last meeting, had been awarded a prize by the British Association of Landscape Industries in December 2014.

26/16 West Berkshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) reported that her Council's Waste Team had, so far in the current financial year, cleared 108 fly-tips from public rights of way. In the last financial year, it had cleared a total of 165. It was not possible to allocate a cost to these clearances as this was dependent on the size of the fly-tip.

No CCTV cameras had been used on rights of way but they had been used on fly-tip hot spot areas. In order to put in these cameras, it was necessary to have signage and complete a justification test under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. However, following on from some recent successful prosecutions, the Waste Team were looking at installing cameras in other locations.

NOTED

29 Membership of the Forum

RESOLVED: That the National Farmers' Union and the Country Land & Business Association be notified of the vacancies for members who are owners and occupiers of access land or land over which rights of way subsisted.

30 Wokingham Rights of Way

Cllr A Ross advised that he would contact the Forum's Wokingham ROWIP Group, if necessary, about the Working Group's observations reported at the last meeting.

NOTED

32 Working Groups

Mrs M Pawson indicated that, rather than be the Convenor, she was willing to act as the interim Co-ordinator for the **Reading ROWIP Working Group**.

NOTED

35 Snelsmore Common Proposed Bridleway Link

Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) advised that her Council had identified the work required for the new bridleway link from Chieveley to Snelsmore Common and the legal procedures for removing the obstructions. The matter was now being dealt with by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and the plan was to clear the route in November. However, funding would be required, and Members indicated that they were prepared to help seeking such funding

36 Use of Former Railway Line as a Path

Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) advised that some progress had been made to create a new path from Hampstead Norreys to Hermitage, and that she intended to circulate a progress report to Members in March 2015.

38 Availability of Highway Information for the Public

Members were reminded that the information available electronically regarding the list of streets varied throughout the country. The adopted roads in West Berkshire could be identified on the website and Wokingham Borough Council had put their Rights of Way on line.

NOTED

40 Canal and River Trust

RESOLVED: That the Canal and River Trust be invited to be represented at the next meeting, with regard to access and public rights of way on land owned or managed by the Trust, with a view to regular liaison in connection with future projects.

44 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Forum was reminded of the provisions of Regulation 6(8) of the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007 concerning disclosure of interests. Members declared interests as follows:-

Item	Subject	Interest
14	West Berkshire Commons and Open Spaces	
	Members of, and involved with, BBOWT -	Mr G Smith, Mr C N B Marriage & Mrs H Barker
	Newbury & Thatcham Green Gym -	Mrs H Barker
17	Minute 57 M4 Junctions 3-12 - Smart Motorway -	Mr P Todd, clients' interests

NOTED

45 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Forum received a report by the Secretary reminding it of its decisions, at its first meeting, regarding public participation at meetings.

No questions had been received in advance of the meeting.

NOTED

46 READING RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Ms N Lucas (Reading) advised that the Reading ROWIP Working Group had met that day. An action plan for the next financial year had been agreed.

Members were reminded that, presently, the membership of the Working Group was 2 members, excluding the ex-officio members.

RESOLVED:

- 1 That consideration of the report of the Reading ROWIP Working Group be deferred to the next meeting,**
- 2 That, in the meantime, the Action Plan for the financial year 1 April 2015 - 31 March 2016 be circulated to Forum Members**

47 UNDERPASS AT NAPIER ROAD

The Forum had received a report from Ms N Lucas (Reading) advising on the latest position regarding the re-opening of the underpass beneath the railway lines at Napier Road, Reading. The Licence Agreement with Network Rail, enabling work in and use of the Napier Road underpass as a permissive route had finally been signed on 6 November 2014. The tender documentation was being finalised and the Council aimed to commence work by the end of March - beginning of April, with a view to completion by the summer 2015.

NOTED

47 THE HEIGHTS FREE SCHOOL, CAVERSHAM, READING - SITE CONSULTATION

The Forum considered a report by the Secretary, circulated with the Agenda, advising on the consultation process concerning the site for the Heights Free School in Caversham, Reading.

The Forum was invited to comment because 3 of the sites identified by the Education Funding Agency - Mapledurham Playing Fields, Albert Road Recreation Ground, and Shipnells Farm ("Bugs Bottom") - were presently used for outdoor recreation, in the main.

Following full discussion, it was

RESOLVED: That the Reading Borough Council and the Education Funding Agency be advised that, in principle, the Forum would be opposed to the building of a new school on land used for public outdoor recreation, unless replacement provision was made within the Borough.

49 CROSS BOUNDARY LIAISON

The Forum was reminded that, in accordance with the Guidance on Local Access Forums in England issued by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, it had nominated persons to attend, as observers, meetings of the neighbouring local access fora.

Mr C Patient advised that he had yet to attend a meeting of the **Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum**.

A report by the Chairman about the **Hampshire Countryside Access Forum's** meetings held on 10 September and 4 December 2014 had been circulated with the Agenda.

Mr C N B Marriage reported orally on the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum meeting, which he had attended on 13 January 2015, as follows:-

1. The need had been identified for a “dedicated” Cycling Officer for Oxfordshire.
2. The Grade II listed Marcham Bridleway bridge, over which a major bridleway route ran, was in need of repair. The land owner had closed the bridleway and had now refused to pay for any repair.
3. New permanent officers were to be appointed to manage the two National Trails - the Thames Path and The Ridgeway - and Oxfordshire County Council would like to host those officers.
4. “Leader” funding was available for Rural Economic Development and the Forum discussed whether this could be used for improving or developing new rights of way which could include a farm shop.
5. Oxfordshire’s ROWIP was called a “ROWMP” - Rights of Way Management Plan.
6. Oxfordshire had a 6 year backlog in dealing with Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs).
7. Consultation between Rights of Way Officers and Planning Officers would be strengthened where any developments impacted on rights of way.
8. Permissive Paths under higher level stewardship would finish by 2020. Members of the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum, with help from Officers, were proposing to negotiate with each of the landowners for their 77 paths to try to keep them in place

Under point 6, Mr P D G Todd observed that the provisions of the Deregulation Bill, when enacted, would impact on the number, and speed of disposal, of DMMOs.

Members noted, in connection with point 4, that projects to improve the public rights of way network could boost the rural economy, and thus might qualify for “Leader” funding.

A report by Mr R R Sharp on the **Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Access Forum** meeting on 2 December 2014 had been circulated with the Agenda.

RESOLVED:

- 1 That the reports by Dr J C Bridger, Mr C N B Marriage and Mr R R Sharp be noted.
- 2 That the effect of the De-Regulation Bill currently going through Parliament, with regard to public rights of way being devolved to a local level, be added to the Work Programme for a future meeting.

50 WORKING GROUPS

Mrs M Pawson advised that the **Access for Disabled People Group** was looking at access for Wokefield Common and it was possible that there could be 3 paths.

Mr C N B Marriage advised that the **Development of New Access and Maintenance of Existing Rights of Way Group** had met the **Wokingham ROWIP Working Group** to assist the preparation of draft advice to Wokingham Borough Council about the provision of outdoor recreation facilities for equestrians. This advice is considered under Minute 57 below.

Mr B Lambert advised that the **West Berkshire ROWIP** had a review meeting scheduled for May.

RESOLVED: That Mrs H M Barker and Mr A Thomas be appointed members of the **Access for Disabled People Working Group**.

51 COMMENTS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Forum considered the comments on Planning Applications, circulated with Agenda, which had been submitted on the authority of the Chairman in consultation with Members, as follows:

West Berkshire Council

Application 14/02642/FUL - Development comprising the retention of the existing access road, the retention of the existing concrete pad, the retention of the existing gates and fencing and the extension of the existing road to an existing gateway at the northern end of the Chalky Lane byway. S Grundon Ltd, Old Kiln Quarry, Oxford Road, Chieveley, Newbury.

Application 14/02480/OUTMAJ - for up to 401 dwellings etc on land adjacent to Hilltop, Oxford Road, Donnington, Newbury.

Wokingham Borough Council

Application F/2014/2119 - Redevelopment of former Bearwood Golf Club, Mole Road, Sindlesham, to provide a new football training ground and academy facility

Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) advised her Council considered that Application 14/02642/FUL could not be determined.

RESOLVED: That the action of the Chairman be approved and confirmed.

52 WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL PLAN - SANDLEFORD PARK SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

The Forum considered a report from the Secretary inviting it to give advice to the West Berkshire Council on the proposed amendment to the latter's Sandleford Park Supplementary Planning Document, part of the suite of documents forming the Council's Local Plan.

The Local Plan was the overall Development Plan for West Berkshire, setting out the Council's local planning policies. Applications for planning permission had to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicated otherwise.

Sandleford Park was allocated as a strategic site for up to 2,000 dwellings. A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been prepared for the site and adopted in September 2013. It had now been amended to reflect the need for a single planning application for the site.

Members commented that detailed suggestions made by Mr S Brook, and appended to the report, could be submitted in response to the planning application, once that had been registered.

RESOLVED:

That the advice, as set out in plain text in the Appendix to the report, be submitted to the West Berkshire Council, subject to the addition of reference to strengthened access links with Greenham Common.

53 WEST BERKSHIRE RIGHTS OF WAY

The Forum had received a report from Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) concerning the Council's proposed programme of works of maintenance and improvement of rights of way. *Unfortunately, an incorrect schedule of works was appended to the report: the correct version was circulated subsequent to the meeting.* Ms Cox advised that it was unlikely there would be sufficient funding to meet all the requirements and Members were asked to identify items that they considered to be a high priority. After due consideration it was -

RESOLVED:

- 1 That the West Berkshire Council be advised that priority should be given to any areas of path that could be a danger to the public and in need of immediate attention.
- 2 That a report be submitted to the next meeting showing the likely cost of, and budget for, the programme.

54 VEHICULAR USE IN BUCKLEBURY AND FARNBOROUGH

The Forum had received a report from Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) about the action to tackle abuse, or illegal use, of non-vehicular rights of way in the Bucklebury and Farnborough areas. Members were reminded that West Berkshire Council would be reporting at the next meeting about its study into vehicular use.

NOTED

55 WEST BERKSHIRE COMMONS AND OPEN SPACES

Members considered a report from the Secretary about the completion of the audits by the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) on the commons and other open spaces managed by them.

Members recalled that the West Berkshire Council had entered into an arrangement in January 2014 for BBOWT to manage the commons at Bucklebury, Crookham, Greenham, Padworth, Snelsmore and Wokefield, and 4 other sites - Audreys Meadow, Hosehill Lake, Paices Hill Country Park and Thatcham Reedbeds. Representatives of the Trust had attended the Forum's meeting in May 2014, when they had given presentations on the work and vision of BBOWT. It had then been reported that BBOWT would be carrying out a base-line audit of the sites in terms of accessibility, both physically and digitally, working closely with the Council and with volunteers to map and survey boundaries, paths and tracks. It had been hoped to complete the site work by the end of July 2014. The Forum had then decided that its West Berkshire ROWIP Working Group be authorised to respond in detail, on behalf of the Forum, to BBOWT's draft Access Audit reports.

BBOWT had published some draft reports for consultation, in December 2014, there being reports for each of the sites. The Trust had requested that all comments on the earliest reports be received by 31 January 2015, unless other arrangements were made.

Members discussed how they wished to respond and it was:

RESOLVED:

- 1 That BBOWT be requested to grant an extension of time for the Forum to respond to the audit reports. That the responses be co-ordinated and submitted, on behalf of the Forum, by the West Berkshire ROWIP Working Group,

3 That the following be appointed as the lead members for each response:

Bucklebury Common - Mr C N B Marriage

- **Discovery Centre and Thatcham Reed Beds - Mrs H M Barker**
- **Greenham and Crookham Commons and Audrey's Meadow - Mr S Brook , subject to his willingness**
- **Padworth Common, Paices Wood and Hosehill Lake - Mr G V Smith**
- **Snelsmore Common - Dr J C Bridger**
- **Wokefield Common - Mrs M Pawson**

56 MANAGEMENT OF COMMONS

Members had received a report by the Secretary to which were attached the minutes of the following meetings of Commons' Advisory Committees etc., in West Berkshire.

- **Wokefield Common Advisory Committee - 23 July 2014**

A report by Dr J C Bridger on the Crookham, Greenham and SXnelsmore Commons was circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

Mr C N B Marriage reported orally on the Bucklebury Common Advisory Committee meeting held on 13 November 2014. An access audit report was due and there continued to be an ongoing problem of 4x4 vehicles on the Common which the West Berkshire Council were endeavouring to control.

Mr G V Smith said he was not aware of any meeting of the Padworth Common Advisory Committee.

NOTED

57 WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - EQUESTRIAN ADVICE

The Forum considered a report from the Secretary attaching draft advice, prepared for Wokingham Borough Council, by the Forum's Wokingham ROWIP Working Group about the provision of outdoor recreation facilities for equestrians.

At its last meeting, the Forum had received a presentation by Cllr A Ross about the ambitions of Wokingham Borough Council concerning access to outdoor recreation, and the development, for instance, of greenways. Arising from this, the Forum had decided that its Wokingham ROWIP Working Group should devise a focussed proposal for the development of better equestrian provision, as advice on access to open air recreation, for consideration by the Forum, with a view to submission to the Council.

The Chairman commented that this advice represented a great deal of work by the Working Group, and others, for which she thanked them. Mr C N B Marriage said that he had been

impressed to read that horse riding and its associated businesses in the area contributed some £12m per annum to the local economy.

In adopting the draft advice, the Forum suggested that it should be sent to the Council's Director of the Environment, with copies to the Executive Member for Planning and Transport.

RESOLVED:

That the draft advice appended to be report be adopted and submitted to Wokingham Borough Council.

58 M4 JUNCTIONS 3-4 - SMART MOTORWAY

Members had received a report from the Secretary, circulated with the Agenda, advising on the implications for access to outdoor recreation of the proposals, by the Highways Agency for converting the M4 to a smart motorway between Junctions 3 and 12, with a view to relieving congestion by converting the hard shoulder to a running lane and using technology to vary the mandatory speed limits.

The Agency had initiated public consultation on the proposal on 12 January 2015: the closing date for comments is 22 February. The Agency indicated in the document that there might be closures of public rights of way along the M4 for up to 2 years, but at this stage there was no definite official information on those affected. A list of public rights of way possibly affected by the proposal was included in the report.

Following discussion it was -

RESOLVED:

- 1 That Mrs J Heard be appointed to keep the matter under review and advise the Forum thereon accordingly.**
- 2 That the Highways' Agency be invited to be represented at the next meeting to provide an update on the proposals, especially the possible closure of rights of way during the works on the motorway.**

59 THE RIDGEWAY NATIONAL TRAIL

The Forum received a report from the Secretary to alert it to the proposals for the future management of the Ridgeway National Trail, following a review by Natural England .

Members were reminded that there were 2 national trails in the Forum's area - the Ridgeway and the Thames Path. An interim local management group had been set up for the Ridgeway - the Ridgeway Partnership. The composition of this group was being determined. It was intended that different user groups who used the Ridgeway for recreation would be

represented, plus other interest groups, together with highway authorities. As well as the management group there would be an annual Ridgeway Forum at which LAFs might be represented.

Ms E Cox (West Berkshire) commented that she would attend the Ridgeway Partnership of behalf of the Council and volunteered to advise the Forum about issues relating to the 2 national trails.

The Chairman reported that she and Ms Cox had met with Oliver Cripps (North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and some members of the other LAFs within the AONB area on 2 December 2014 to discuss issues of common interest, including the possibility of LEADER funding.

Reverting to the primary issue, following discussion, it was -

RESOLVED

That the Forum should ensure that it is represented at the Annual Ridgeway Forum and the similar meeting for the Thames Path.

60 ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP SCHEMES - IMPACT ON ACCESS

Members received, and noted, a report from the Secretary advising on the responses from Dan Rogerson MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs & Resource Manager, and Richard Benyon, MP for Newbury, with regard to the changes on the various Environmental Stewardship Schemes managed by Natural England.

The Chairman advised that the information about the changes had been included on "Huddle" and that she would raise the issues with other LAF Chairs.

RESOLVED:

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That Members be encouraged to make contact with relevant local landowners to ask them to consider keeping open any permissive rights of way on their land linked to Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

61 SECRETARY TO THE FORUM

The Forum received a report advising that R F Penfold, who had been the Forum's Secretary since its inception, had retired from his position with Reading Borough Council during December 2014.

Mr Penfold had agreed to continue in his role as the Forum's Secretary until 31 March 2015, pending the appointment of a successor by the 3 local authorities.

On behalf of all Members, the Chairman thanked Mr Penfold for all his work as Secretary over the last 11 years. His background knowledge and experience had been invaluable to the Forum and he would be greatly missed.

NOTED

62 WORK PROGRAMME

The Forum considered a report by the Secretary inviting it to settle the work programme for the ensuing year. The Forum was reminded that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs had suggested, in her guidance, that each Forum should endeavour to agree an annual work programme, taking account of its work priorities.

RESOLVED: That the following work programme be adopted:-

- a Meeting to be held in May 2015
 - Part reconstitution
 - Adoption of Annual Report
 - Monitoring report by West Berkshire ROWIP Working Group
 - Report on study by West Berkshire Council on vehicular abuse of rights of way
 - Highways' Agency re M4
 - Canal and River Trust
 - Historic research of rights of way
 - Revised arrangements for DMMOs
 - Routes derived from planning permissions
 - Site visit

- b Meeting to be held in September 2015
 - Monitoring report by Wokingham ROWIP Working Group
 - Site visit

- c Meeting to be held in January 2016
 - Monitoring report by Reading ROWIP Working Group
 - Site visit