

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD AT THE ACLAND HALL, COLD ASH, ON WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2015 AT 2PM

Apologies: Councillor Tony Page; Councillor Keith Chopping; David Mills; Natalie Lucas; Barry Lambert.

Present: Janice Bridger (Chairman); Chris Marriage; Colin Patient; Graham Smith; Helena Barker; Margaret Pawson; Patrick Todd; Councillor Angus Ross; Ray Sharp; Robert O'Neill; Liz Connolly; Jan Heard.

In attendance: Rebecca Walkley (Wokingham Borough Council); Elaine Cox (Secretary / West Berkshire District Council)

One member of the public was present: Lawrence Heath

SITE VISIT

A visit had been arranged to view the damage to byways and common land at Ramsbury Corner, Bucklebury Common, West Berks. Elaine Cox, Janice Bridger, Chris Marriage, Colin Patient & Robert O'Neill attended. The visit was a sequel to the report submitted to the Forum in 2013. Since then a TRO had been placed on one of the byways pending repair. Elaine Cox, who was visiting the site for the first time, asked about the attitude to the damage of the landowner and the Bucklebury Common Advisory Group.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED : Janice Bridger was proposed by Chris Marriage and seconded by Margaret Pawson.

Janice Bridger accepted on the condition there will be a new Secretary to the Forum for the next meeting in September.

The forum thanked Janice Bridger and Elaine Cox for filling in during the present period where the Forum is without a Secretary.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: Jan Heard accepted, pending a possible application from Tony Vickers.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 21 January 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

29: Membership of the Forum

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

ACTION BY: Secretary

30: Wokingham rights of way

RESOLVED: Cllr. Angus Ross was reminded of the action to contact the LAF's Wokingham ROWIP group, if necessary, about the Working Group's observations reported in September 2014.

ACTION BY: Cllr. Angus Ross

40: Canal and River Trust

RESOLVED: That an invitation to the Canal and River Trust be made, 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.

ACTION BY: Secretary

46: Reading Rights of Way Improvement Plan

RESOLVED: that Margaret Pawson contact Natalie Lucas to chase up the report of the Reading ROWIP Working Group.

ACTION BY: Margaret Pawson

51: Comments on planning applications

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. The application had been refused. Janice Bridger had raised the issue of re-instatement of the byway at the Chieveley Parish assembly in April and with Stuart Higgins, the Definitive map officer. He had contacted the landowner but received no reply to date. The temporary permissive route remains open.

RESOLVED: Elaine Cox to check that measures were in place to reinstate the original Definitive line of Byway 49 Chieveley across the restored quarry.

ACTION BY: Elaine Cox

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.

It was reported that Jan Heard and access users had made progress with the proposal for a safe equestrian crossing.

RESOLVED: Rebecca Walkley said she would try to assist internally by setting up a further meeting and liaising with WBC planners.

ACTION BY: Jan Heard / Rebecca Walkley

53. West Berkshire Rights of Way

Elaine Cox reported that quotations were still being obtained for the planned work for 2015/16.

RESOLVED: *Elaine Cox to submit a report to the next meeting to set out: 1. West Berkshire Council's confirmed maintenance/improvement schedule for 2015/16, with costs. 2. The priority given to other requests from the LAF.*

ACTION BY: Elaine Cox

57. Wokingham Borough Council - equestrian advice.

Janice Bridger handed out copies of a guidance leaflet.

RESOLVED: the report of the Wokingham ROWIP Working Group, about the provision of outdoor recreational facilities for equestrians, be sent to Wokingham Borough Council's Director of Environment, with copies to the Executive Member for Planning and Transport.
ACTION BY: Wokingham ROWIP Working Group

58. M4 Junctions 3-4 Smart Motorway

Jan Heard expressed an interest in the environmental impact of this scheme.

RESOLVED: Elaine Cox is to send Jan Heard a contact for the Highways Agency, with whom she had been corresponding.

ACTION BY: Elaine Cox

5. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Graham Smith declared an interest in his capacity as a member of BBOWT.

NOTED

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Lawrence Heath was in attendance as a member of the public. He is a councillor on Barkham Parish Council and has been involved in Arborfield's and Barkham's Neighbourhood Plans. He has been involved in looking at 'Greenway' improvements in the two parishes, separate from the Arborfield Garrison development.

Janice Bridger explained that the LAF also issued advice to local authorities on access matters.

7. MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORUM

Ray Sharp's and Stephen Brook's terms had ended and they did not wish to stand again. Tony Vickers had not been re-elected as a local councillor and thus no longer had a seat on the forum.

Liz Connolly / Jan Heard / Robert O'Neill/ Anthony Thomas's three year terms had come to an end but they were assumed to be able to continue.

RESOLVED: the local authorities are to advertise the vacancies. It was assumed that other members continue - clarification of the procedure would be welcomed.

ACTION BY: Secretary / local authorities

8. CROSS-BOUNDARY LIAISON

Members were presented with written reports on recent meetings of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (Janice Bridger) and the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (Chris Marriage). Colin Patient had attended the Bracknell Forest LAF. He reported that he has been impressed by the idea of QR codes on rights of way signs, which link via a phone to a web page containing path details. It was also potentially a useful way of relaying other information to the public.

A meeting of local LAF chairmen was held on 5th Feb in Maidenhead to liaise on cross boundary issues. The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead picked up on the M4 SMART Motorway project & will pursue. A meeting of SE LAF chairs was held in London on 27th Jan. where (i) joint working between neighbouring LAFs was highlighted and (ii) that LAFs need to ask to be consultees to those s94 bodies which they are expected to advise as they are not statutory consultees.

NOTED

9. WORKING GROUPS

It was suggested that a review of the working groups be undertaken, when the new constitution of the Forum was known.

RESOLVED: to undertake a review of the sub-groups once the new composition of the LAF is known.

ACTION BY: Secretary / Forum

West Berkshire ROWIP working group

A written report was presented to members. It noted, amongst other issues, the detailed and comprehensive responses by LAF members to the BBOWT access audits of Padworth, Snelsmore & Wokefield commons, Audreys's Meadow, Hosehill Lake, Paices Wood & Thatcham Reedbeds. The response to Greenham & Crookham Commons was in progress. Reports for Bucklebury Common & the Nature Discovery Centre were awaited.

NOTED

Wokingham ROWIP working group

A written report was presented to members. Ray Sharp added that the group had met, and submitted to the District Council ideas for access linkages, along with the earlier report on equestrian advice. He hoped both would be taken into account.

Rebecca Walkley said that she planned to revise the Wokingham ROWIP to run in parallel with the present planning processes. She is to set up a meeting to see how the working group's comments can be incorporated.

Rebecca added that she is now spending one day per week on the Greenways project. The two major landowners involved are sympathetic to the Greenways concept.

Access for disabled people working group

Margaret Pawson gave a verbal update. She had met James Stevenson of BBOWT. The following had been discussed:

- on Wokefield Common there were a number of grassy paths which would be suitable for restricted mobility, they just need a few patch repairs.

- BBOWT has agreed to publicize 'easy access' on its information boards, and was supportive of an idea to use tree trunks as seats. The owner, David Gardiner, was also supportive.

- Margaret has asked that the access audits identify at least one easy access route for each of the other commons. Graham Smith said he had also suggested this for Padworth Common.

Margaret's general feeling was that BBOWT were very supportive of the concept of easy/disabled access. It was also always a good idea to stress to them that measures required to implement ideas need not be very expensive.

NOTED

Development of new access and maintenance of existing rights of way working group

Snelsmore Common link: Elaine Cox updated the group on the work to open up a pedestrian/equestrian/cycle link across Snelsmore Common. The proposal had been presented to BBOWT and a report is being presented by BBOWT to its Trustees.

NOTED

ACTION: Elaine Cox to chase up the decision of the Trustees.

Old railway line link, Hermitage to Hampstead Norreys: Elaine Cox reported that the cycling group 'SPOKES' had offered to take the lead on this project, and at present there were questions over the condition and future maintenance of a number of bridges along the route. There was, however, money

available to create the link from the road through land to the south of the M4 and only a few minor legal obstacles remained here.

NOTED

10. WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL WORK TO TACKLE VEHICLE PROBLEMS

Elaine Cox presented a report, reminding members of the Council's policy and highlighting areas where some aspects of the policy had recently been applied. Since April 2014, an additional couple of hours a week had been allocated for dealing with 2 main known areas: the PRow around Farnborough / Catmore/ West Ilsley and at Ramsbury Corner on Bucklebury Common. The police have been involved at the former and a temporary TRO was in place on the byway at Ramsbury Corner as many of the first priority measures had been tried and failed.

The report also introduced the work of 'Treadlightly', a charity also dedicated to trying to solve problems from vehicles in the countryside. It was possible that Treadlightly could attend the September LAF.

Margaret Pawson questioned the LARA procedure for applying Voluntary Restraint. She did not understand why LARA's permission was required to apply VR. Elaine Cox explained that the success of VR depended on LARA's publicity of the VR, which is sent to vehicle club members, and therefore the scheme had to work as a partnership.

Patrick Todd said that one solution was the provision of areas on private land, for people to use instead of public rights of way, e.g. old gravel pits. Elaine Cox is to speak to West Berkshire's planning department. Janice Bridger commented there was a venue at Aldermaston.

Colin Patient was closely familiar with the work of Treadlightly, and he added that they can provide manpower and erect signs.

Chris Marriage requested that more cameras were used at trouble-spots.

RESOLVED:

- Elaine Cox to speak to West Berkshire's planning department about setting aside areas for vehicle use.

- Elaine Cox to investigate the increased use of enforcement cameras.

ACTION BY: Elaine Cox

11. WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL'S RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP) CASE PROGRAMME

A report was presented, giving updates on the key ROWIP priority strategic objectives.

Janice Bridger requested that the Forum be sent the 'Prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and path orders' (ROWIP 12).

There was general concern about fly tipping and rubbish, and what could be done to reduce this. One solution suggested was to reduce the cost of disposal of waste and landfill sites.

RESOLVED:

- Elaine Cox to send to the LAF the 'Prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and path orders' (ROWIP 12).

- West Berkshire ROWIP subgroup to review report and advise LAF on priorities

ACTION BY: Elaine Cox / West Berks ROWIP subgroup

12. ADOPTION OF ANNUAL REPORT

The Forum was asked to approve the draft of the Annual Report contents, and the Chair asked for final comments by 19th June.

RESOLVED: Forum members to submit comments on the draft Annual Report by 19th June.

ACTION: Forum members

13. WORK PROGRAMME OF THE FORUM.

The following elements of the Work Programme were **AGREED**:

23rd September 2015

Monitoring report by Wokingham ROWIP Working Group.

Site visit.

Possible talk by Treadlightly.

Possible talk by the Canal and Rivers Trust.

20th January 2016

Monitoring report by Reading ROWIP Working Group.

Site visit.

14. 'HORIZON SCANNING'

Elaine Cox introduced this proposed new standing item. The idea is to open up discussion about any matters coming up, to do with the work of the LAF, which members can see as potentially having an important bearing on future directions of work.

Margaret Pawson raised the matter of informal access across areas which are now proposed as housing sites. This access often served a useful purpose and could even provide useful links away from roads which serve an important purpose.

The electrification of railway lines was also raised as something to keep an eye on, due to potential negative impacts on local access, and also due to possible opportunities to identify access improvements.

NOTED

15. STEWARDSHIP PERMISSIVE ACCESS AND DEALING WITH NATIONAL ISSUES

A list of former Stewardship permitted access in West Berkshire was presented to the Forum, and members were invited to volunteer to approach the landowners, to ask that they consider continuing the access.

Members were then presented with papers produced by the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF, to do with funding of the stewardship access, and making the requirements of LAFs known to decision-makers.

The Mid and West Berkshire LAF supported the recommendations listed in section 4 of the report, and the Chair is to respond to this effect.

Elaine Cox said that from West Berkshire's point of view, they do not have the resources to pursue permitted access on any meaningful scale, and therefore the help of the LAF was very much welcomed.

RESOLVED:

- Janice Bridger to write to the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF to confirm the support of the MWBLAF.
 - MWBLAF members to approach relevant landowners in West Berkshire to ask for a continuation of the Stewardship access routes.
- ACTION BY: Janice Bridger / Forum members**

16. MANAGEMENT OF THE RIDGEWAY

Elaine Cox updated the Forum on recent developments in management of The Ridgeway National Trail. The recent press release was supplied for members.

Of particular note was the launch of the new Ridgeway Partnership on 1st April 2015. Elaine Cox was presently West Berkshire Council's representative on the Partnership.

It was agreed that Elaine Cox would act as the conduit between the MWBLAF and the Ridgeway Partnership, through raising any agenda items and reporting back.

Graham Smith volunteered to attend the Ridgeway Forum (an annual meeting to include a wider range of interests than can be represented on the Partnership).

RESOLVED: Elaine Cox to advise Graham Smith of the date of the Ridgeway Forum.

ACTION BY: Elaine Cox

17. MANAGEMENT OF COMMONS

The Forum received reports on recent meetings of the Snelsmore Common Management Committee and the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission, including whether each committee is responding to BBOWT's access audits.

The Forum stated that it seemed that, on the whole, access matters were fairly low on the priorities of the management bodies, with the exception of the Commission.

NOTED

18. AOB

The agenda papers had included a letter from Fiona Walker from the West Berkshire Ramblers' Association, sent to all West Berkshire Parish and Town Councils. It drew attention to the 2026 'cut-off' date, when any public right of way which existed before 1949 and is not recorded as public highway will be extinguished. The letter reminded the Town and Parish Councils to consider possible routes which will need to be recognized before 2026, in order to be protected. The process then involves historical research and submission of the evidence to the relevant local authority. There had been little response.

One question arose from the Forum, which was about the fee for submitting the evidence. Elaine Cox clarified that there was no fee because the local authorities had a statutory duty to examine the evidence.

There was a general consensus in the Forum that there weren't many such routes in West Berkshire.

NOTED