

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FORUM HELD SHAW HOUSE, NEWBURY ON WEDNESDAY, 24
FEBRUARY 2016

Present: Dr Janice Bridger (Chair), Mrs Helena Barker, Councillor Anthony Chadley, Mrs Jan Heard, Mr Barry Lambert, Mr Chris Marriage, Mr Robert O'Neill, Mr Colin Patient, Mrs Margaret Pawson, Councillor Angus Ross, Mr Graham Smith, Mr Patrick Todd

In Attendance: Ms Elaine Cox (West Berkshire Council), Mrs Sallie Jennings (West Berkshire Council) Ms Natalie Lucas (Reading Borough Council), Mr Mark Morris (Wokingham Borough Council), Mr John Walmsley (Secretary)

Apologies for Absence: Mr David Mills, Ms Rebecca Walkley (Wokingham Borough Council)

Not Present: Mrs Sally Wallington, Councillor Tony Page

Observers and Guests: Mr Alex Cruickshank (BBOWT), Mr Mark Evans (Canal and River Trust) Mr Duncan Green (Treadlightly), Mr Alan Keene (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead LAF, Mrs Gloria Keene (CPRE), Mr Paul Harris (Oxfordshire County Council), Mr James Stevenson (BBOWT), Mr Peter Thorne (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead LAF), Ms Caroline Robson (Canal and River Trust), Mr Michael Scholl, Mr Dick Vincent (Canal and River Trust), Mr Dale Wyatt (Treadlightly)

1 WELCOMES

Janice Bridger noted the strong turnout for the meeting, and welcomed:

- Councillor Anthony Chadley, the newly nominated elected representative for West Berks Council
- Guests from Canal & River Trust (CRT), and Treadlightly (TL), both giving presentations and entering into dialogue with the LAF on special topics
- Observers from a range of organisations and individual members of the public, as listed above

1a DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Angus Ross stated that he was attending on behalf of the Berkshire Nature Partnership as well as in his usual capacity as the nominated elected representative of Wokingham Borough Council.

2 SPECIAL TOPIC - CANAL AND RIVER TRUST (CRT)

Mark Evans and Dick Vincent made a presentation, and then engaged in discussion with the Forum. Some of the many points of interest were:

- A new CRT policy promoting safe, considerate use of towpaths. Called [Better Towpaths for Everyone](#) it sets out how CRT intends “to encourage safe, responsible use of the nation’s towpaths by the millions of people who visit each year. The policy advises that priority should generally be given to the slowest and those using the waterway (i.e. pedestrians and those handling boats), and also outlines the simple ways in which people using the towpath can play their part by being careful and considerate to others”.

- A big national campaign around the new policy and the existing strapline “share the space, drop your pace” is to be given an extra push in April when the towpaths start to get busy again with many events planned for the coming year.
- A 2.5m width is ideal for most towpaths, although often there are constraints forcing a narrower width. Improvements always aim to benefit all visitors and maintain the existing natural (or otherwise) look of the area.
- Not all canals, and not all rivers in the UK are managed by CRT. It is a complex picture.
- Bob O’Neill asked what had happened to the old 10 year plans for access to waterways, dating from the British Waterways Board days. Dick Vincent replied that the aims for access should still be the same, but he would check the history and what had been done to make good on promises from the past.
- Chris Marriage asked about access on towpaths for horses and cyclists. Mark replied that horses were not generally encouraged other than for a relatively few horse-drawn barge operations for visitors to some sites, the main reason being a number of safety issues. Janice Bridger noted an exception to this rule at Bedford where there are plans to give equestrian access. Mark also reassured that there were definitely no plans to charge for cycling.
- Patrick Todd asked who was responsible for leaks. CRT answered that they are responsible on canals managed by them, but not necessarily for seepages. The meeting did not get into detail about the difference between leaks and seepages.
- Jan Heard commented that Reading to Aldermaston along the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath was difficult on bicycles e.g. due to barriers at Aldermaston. Mark said that he as Waterway Manager for the Kennet & Avon (K&A) region would be prepared to consider removal of barriers in response to a written request. Such action might be possible if done in consultation with Police and the Local Authority, for instance to facilitate more enforcement against motorcyclists after a barrier is taken out.
- Janice Bridger asked about disabled access. Dick Vincent confirmed that this was allowed, including mobility scooters of the “Tramper” kind. CRT would like to do more on disability access, subject to funds being available. Caroline Robson mentioned a CRT partnership with the Scouts, supporting Leonard Cheshire Foundation and Guide dogs for the Blind, which could result in improvements to help mobility impaired and blind people respectively.
- Angus Ross asked what proportion of the K&A towpath was designated as public rights of way. Mark advised that 100% of K&A towpath was PROW, although this was not the case nationally.
- Margaret Pawson asked what legislation could be used for enforcement action, other than that which related to Public Rights of Way (PROW) generally. Dick answered that there are also some old bylaws that can be used, but are usually not as effective as local authority’s powers. CRT always adheres to Highway/PROW law for closures (e.g. for maintenance). CRT look at enforcement primarily as one way of addressing anti-social behaviour and work closely with local authority to do this. Ultimately civil order is a responsibility for the police.

Check the history of access policy, with respect to previous BWB and current CRT policy.	Dick Vincent
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Post-meeting note. The CRT slides have been circulated to Forum members following the meeting.

3 SPECIAL TOPIC - TREADLIGHTLY

Duncan Green and Dale Wyatt made a presentation, and then engaged in discussion with the Forum. Duncan is Chair of a Parish council in Herefordshire, and Deputy Chair of Hereford LAF. Dale is the Treadlightly (TL) ambassador for Wiltshire and a member of Wilts and Swindon LAF. Some of the many points of interest were:

- TL and the Ramblers work together to do Byway repairs in Herefordshire, sometimes also in conjunction with Balfour Beatty, the Local Authority's nominated contractor.
- TL actively support the Welsh Off Road Motors Strategy (WORMS) which has three strands: Education, Enforcement, Provision. Duncan emphasised the need to pursue all three in parallel, otherwise illegal or problematic MPV use simply moves elsewhere.
- Samples of 2 TL leaflets were made available in the meeting. These seek to educate motorised off-road users on the law and good practice, and give information about what TL does.
- TL gave examples of partnership working for maintenance (e.g. Rhyader, Powys), enforcement (e.g. joint activity with Police), construction (e.g. new bridge in Brecon Beacons National Park), and improved waymarking (Salisbury Plain, with Wilts CC and MOD).
- In answer to the question of what it could do for Mid and West Berks LAF, TL listed the following possibilities:
 - Reduce costs through volunteers (transport & manpower)
 - "Back to work" or "Young Offender" schemes
 - Landscape work
 - Reduce vehicle issues (education and enforcement)
 - Encourage more Police activity
 - Waymark
 - Communicate with vehicle users
 - Provide more information (SSSIs etc)
 - Partnership Projects
 - Use TL's Charity status to leverage funds e.g. grants for projects
 - Dedications and permissive route funding
- In the discussion that followed, Sallie Jennings mentioned West Berks Council's work with local residents of the Catmore and Bucklebury areas. Catching illegal use with wildlife cameras was a useful method but care had to be taken to avoid infringing RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000).
- Duncan Green said that TL could (and had) extended police resources with TL vehicles. Hard evidence was essential e.g. photos with time and date. However Police warning letters could still be sent to illegal users even without conclusive proof of time and date. TL could also help with education for the Police themselves, to supplement the minimal standard training they received on the law relating to PROW.
- Jan Heard asked about insurance and legal issues for doing maintenance work. Dale Wyatt confirmed they had insurance, although responsibility in the event of an accident might still be debatable depending on the situation. Duncan Green stated that some Local Authorities that they worked with insisted on everything being done to their own specifications, methods, and using their own contractors, whereas others were more flexible.
- Dale Wyatt commented that "mudpluggers" should always be on private land in a play and pay capacity, and it was noted that one such facility for this was at Aldermaston.
- Emphasising the need for provision for legal and responsible vehicle use, Dale noted that the Forestry Commission had had a problem with mountain bike use until they started to build and encourage the use of purpose built tracks.

- Chris Marriage mentioned that he was a member of GLEAM and raised the subject of the suitability of surfaces of Byways. Some are hard and can tolerate more use than those that are soft.
- Post-meeting note: Chris, Duncan, and Dale have been in touch and are likely to continue discussions in a GLEAM-TL context.
- Post-meeting note: The TL slides have been circulated to Forum members following the meeting.

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 2015 MEETING

The draft minutes were circulated to members on the 4th December for comment and correction. There were no amendments and the minutes were taken as an accurate record.

4A MATTERS ARISING FROM NOVEMBER 2015 MEETING

- Elaine Cox clarified that the West Berks Council Countryside portfolio holder was no longer Cllr Keith Chopping, but the role had reverted to Cllr Hillary Cole.
- It was decided that the LAF's Letter to the Bucks, Berks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) praising their access work on West Berks Commons should also be copied to Paul Hendry and Hillary Cole.

Copy the Forum's BBOWT letter to Paul Hendry and Hillary Cole.	Janice Bridger
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- Elaine Cox summarised West Berks' work to promoting access and exercise for health, which is now managed by Zoe Campbell in the Public Health team. Copies of the latest Walking for Health newsletter were handed out, along with a flyer for the scheme.

Zoe Campbell to be invited to the May Local Access Forum (LAF) meeting for a fuller discussion of this important topic.	Secretary
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- Application at Buckham Hill, Chaddleworth, West Berks: (originally 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 had previously 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 reply received from West Berks Council to date.

Check up what has happened to the application and the Forum's proposal.	Elaine Cox
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- The West Berks document named 'Prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and path orders' had been circulated since the November meeting. Any queries on it should be raised before the May 2016 meeting. Elaine Cox noted that the new Deregulation Act affects the way in which local authorities deal with public path orders.

Put the Deregulation Act on the agenda for the May 2016 meeting	Secretary
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- Elaine Cox reported that West Berks Council had a budget of £100K for flood damage, of which about 50% had been spent. It was hoped that the remainder would be carried over to the new financial year beginning in April 2016. With reference to the action on this subject in the November 2015 minutes, no additional locations suffering flood damage had been advised to Elaine to date.

- g. Greenham Common Encroachment survey. Alex Cruickshank (BBOWT) stated that BBOWT were trying to identify who the encroachers were, on an area by area basis. A number of residents had been contacted, and some positive responses received (e.g. along the lines of “hadn’t realised....will remove”). This work is ongoing.
- h. Elaine Cox gave an update on the proposed Hampstead Norreys - Hermitage railway line path. Spokes are willing to manage the project. The Transport Policy Officer at West Berks Council is in contact with HE and Spokes. Another meeting is planned. Chris Marriage & Janice Bridger will attend.

5 LAF MEMBER RECRUITMENT

Bob O’Neill and Barry Lambert are standing down at the end of their terms. Janice Bridger thanked Bob and Barry for their contributions while serving as members of the Forum.

John Walmsley stated that recruitment for new members had begun with items in the e-newsletters of both the local National Farmers Union (NFU) and Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which had been arranged by Patrick Todd. So far there had been no new leads from these sources, but it was worth trying again as landowner/land manager/farmer representation was often the hardest to attract, and the Forum has duty to try to obtain a balance of interests.

Angus Ross suggested Farley Farms and the University Farm as possible sources of landowner representation, and the former could be contacted via him.

Add Farley Farms and the University Farm to the list of recruitment channels and send them the advertisement for new members.	Secretary
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Observers from Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (RBWM) LAF commented that farmers can be willing to come to LAF meetings for a one off presentation or discussion, but are less keen on joining as members. RBWM do have representation from the National Trust though, and they suggested the Woodland Trust as another possible avenue of land management representation.

John Walmsley stated that recruitment adverts had been drafted for local papers, and Elaine Cox confirmed that West Berks Council would get these placed via their press office team.

6 CLAIMING OF EXPENSES FOR 2015/16

Elaine Cox stated that new expense claim forms were now ready to be sent to members, and should be used for LAF expenses that are now payable by West Berks Council.

Post meeting note: Elaine has circulated the new forms to members.

7 UPDATE ON RECENT ANTI-VEHICLE MEASURES ON PROW & BUCKLEBURY COMMONS

Sallie Jennings reported on recent enforcement activity in conjunction with the police at Bucklebury and Farnborough / Catmore, when 3 section 59 warning notices were issued. New signage had been used to indicate to people in the neighbourhood that a police operation was in progress. Sallie also mentioned that local residents were being encouraged to report incidents, and that the police now had maps showing the worst locations where illegal activity

takes place, thus facilitating familiarity and a potentially faster response. Bollards had been put in at some locations

Mike Scholl, a Bucklebury area resident, commented that some good work had been done, but illegal MPV use was difficult to tackle. He felt more cameras were needed, and recognised that there was a cost issue involved.

Peter Thorne (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead LAF) stated that signage in his area included a telephone number to encourage people to report illegal use, and that both police and landowners could sometimes respond quickly to such reports. Andrew Fletcher at RBWM has further details.

Contact Andrew Fletcher to obtain further information about RBWM's methods.	Secretary
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8 M4 SMART MOTORWAY

Jan Heard summarised her written report (see separate document). Although Highways England (HE) had not agreed with all the Forum's points, and the detailed design phase was yet to come, they had nevertheless given a measure of reassurance on some issues e.g. crash barriers at the top of a steep slope down to a PROW, and that noise levels would not increase. The suggestion from the November 2015 meeting that Wokingham BC do some before and after noise level monitoring was left undecided for the moment. HE will not improve crossings but will replace 'like-for-like'.

In general it seems that the Forum has done as much as it can, and a watching brief should be maintained during the detailed design and construction phases.

4B MOLE ROAD CROSSING

Jan Heard had provided a written report on the issues surrounding the provision of a signal controlled crossing where a Byway crosses Mole Road (see separate document).

Mark Morris stated that Wokingham Borough Council hoped to be able to implement the crossing as part of the Greenways scheme. Jan was very unhappy that the developer of the Reading Football Club Training Ground had offered land for this, and it seemed to have been turned down. She also said that the planning decision had been a close call and that some people had only supported it in the basis that the crossing was compensation for loss of other public facilities (a golf course and a riding business).

Jan Heard and Angus Ross disagreed on whether the crossing was inside or outside the boundary of the development boundary. Angus stated that the crossing was not shown as part of the development scheme when it came to elected representatives from the Planning Department.

Janice Bridger asked for clarification of where in the process the crossing had been lost from the development. The issue had been queried by others (e.g. a Parish Councillor), and Wokingham Borough Council had been requested to respond.

There was no information about whether a feasibility study had been conducted as had been stated in the previous minutes.

Angus Ross to update the LAF as soon as practicable	Angus Ross
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9 CROSS-BOUNDARY LIAISON: IMPORTANT ISSUES FROM RECENT MEETINGS OF NEIGHBOURING LAFS

Chris Marriage had attended the Oxfordshire LAF on 19th January 2016 and handed out a report of the meeting.

10 COMMONS: IMPORTANT ISSUES FROM LAF MEMBERS ON COMMONS ADVISORY GROUPS

In response to a question from Chris Marriage about progress with an access report for Bucklebury Common, James Stevenson replied that he had carried out 2 site surveys to date. The report was part drafted, and his next step was to have a discussion with Sally Wallington.

Margaret Pawson circulated a map of the easy access route on Wokefield Common.

Janice made the meeting aware of a vacancy on the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission for a Sport and Recreation Alliance representative. Anyone who is interested should let Janice know.

11 READING ROWIP

Natalie Lucas stated that there had been no meeting with the Reading ROWIP Working Group yet. She also gave the good news that the Napier Road underpass had been opened, and that it would be seen by members attending the site visit after the May Forum meeting. The site visit could also take in the new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the Thames. Bob O'Neill commented that the cycle lane markings on the bridge were somewhat strange.

12 TRAINING

John Walmsley was thanked for his web page with sources of rights of way information and the list of commonly used abbreviations. Janice Bridger will inform the Forum of any training organized by the Berkshire Forums. Huddle was mentioned as a source of information.

13 AOB

Margaret Pawson thanked BBOWT for seeking comments from members of the Forum to the artworks for the interpretation/orientation boards to be erected on the West Berkshire Commons, and felt this work was proceeding well. Forum members are to respond individually, if they wish.

Jan Heard reported that the Wokingham ROWIP group had met recently, and intended to re-establish some terms of reference with help from Ray Sharp (formerly a member of the Forum).

14 MWBLAF SECRETARY - CURRENT POSITION

A discussion on this topic took place as a closed session i.e. without guests or observers present. Appendix 2 to these minutes is contained in a separate document, and addresses this subject. Appendix 2 is not part of the public record.

Appendix 1 - Updates on actions from the November 2015 meeting (for reference)

Actions from November 2015 meeting with updates *in italics* are listed below for reference, excluding those that are addressed by the minutes of the February 2016 meeting above. Numbering refers to numbering of November 2015 minutes, not Feb 2016 minutes.

<p>6 WEST BERKS ROWIP A copy of the West Berks 'Prioritization scheme for dealing with applications for modification orders and path orders' should be circulated to members</p> <p><i>Circulated to members on 10/2/16 by John Walmsley. Action closed.</i></p>	<p>Elaine Cox</p>
<p>18 MEMBERSHIP & RECRUITMENT 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.</p> <p><i>Action complete. Elaine Cox, Natalie Lucas, and Rebecca Walkley on behalf of the Appointing Authorities have all agreed to extensions for those who indicated they were prepared to continue. Emails to confirm this will be sent after the Feb 2016 meeting.</i></p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>Agree recruitment process with Appointing Authorities (AAs) and Chair</p> <p><i>A revised application pack and application form is available and has been seen by officers of the 3 Appointing Authorities and Chair of the Forum. No decision was made whether or not to hold interviews, but this can be done on a case by case basis (e.g. no interview if the person is well known to the LAF, but interview anyone who is a complete unknown). Action complete.</i></p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>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.</p> <p><i>Appointing Authorities have been circulated with a list of channels that can be used to advertise the recruitment drive 15/2/16.</i></p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>8 BBOWT ACCESS AUDITS OF WEST BERKS COMMONS AND OPEN SPACES 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.</p> <p><i>Action complete. Good replies received from Kate Dent and Estelle Bailey.</i></p>	<p>Janice Bridger</p>
<p>9 WEST BERKS COMMONS - REPORTS ON COMMONS ADVISORY GROUPS Elaine Cox agreed that a TRO extension (or new TRO) would be desirable, and will investigate what can be done.</p> <p><i>Action carried forward to next meeting.</i></p>	<p>Elaine Cox</p>

<p>12 LAF RESPONSE TO CONSULTATIONS Members are asked to provide any further comments on the consultations by 18th December 2015. After that date the response will be sent to South Lincs & Rutland LAF.</p> <p><i>No further comments were received from members, so Janice sent a response to SL&R. Action closed.</i></p>	<p>All</p>
<p>15 PUBLIC OUTREACH 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.</p> <p><i>Action deferred to a future meeting, if it is still required</i></p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>17 HORIZON SCANNING Add climate change to Horizon Scan list, as a possible topic for a future meeting</p> <p><i>Action complete.</i></p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>19 LAF WORK PROGRAMME Add all the items below to the Work Programme, for possible inclusion in future meetings. Potential planning issues were flagged up for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <p><i>Action complete</i></p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>23 AOB Circulate information about the National LAF conference</p> <p><i>Action complete</i></p>	<p>Janice Bridger</p>