

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting of the Forum
2pm Wednesday 5th February 2025

Present: Simon Pike (Chair), Margaret Pawson, Jan Heard, Helena Barker, Donald Peck, Sharon Bovingdon. Tony Vickers, Nicola Greenwood, Janice Bridger, Jon Ford,

In Attendance: Sandra Griffin (Secretary), Elaine Cox (WBDC), Natalie Lucas (RBC), Laura Buck (WBC), Matt Walters (WBDC)

Apologies for absence: Adele Barnett-Wood, Helen Tranter, George Cummings, Connor Clark

Local authority notation: WBC - Wokingham Borough Council.
WBDC - West Berkshire District Council.
RBC - Reading Borough Council.

1. **Simon Pike** (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Jonathan Ford representing TRF, also a regular walker.

2. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

No questions.

3: DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS WITH RESPECT TO AGENDA ITEMS.

None

4: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM SEP 2024 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

Minutes approved by the Chair and the Forum.

Action 5. Laura Buck fed back concerns regarding the lack of WBC Councillor involvement with the Forum. She will do so again.

Action 9. From September minutes: Elaine Cox stated there is no age limit for West Berkshire volunteers.

Action 14. On today's Agenda.

Action 15. Speaker has been approached by the secretary, diaries are being collated.

AOB. Simon Pike to create and circulate a survey re meeting times.

AOB. Lambourn NDP consultation was not responded to due to administrative confusion. Personal apologies were made by the Chair.

Item 8. Following the discussion at the last meeting Donald Peck has raised the issue of access gates and brown discs not being in evidence on Open Access Land.

Action Donald Peck to write a Paper for May meeting.

Action Elaine Cox will check the guidelines pertaining to access to Open Access Land, in particular where the area is not served by any existing public access.

Items of ongoing Interest

Lawrences Lane, TRO has now expired and one year has gone by. The signage is still in place and one bollard still in situ. Janice would like to know what next; it is a point of principle regarding the closure of minor roads.

Action Simon Pike will ask the question at the next Council meeting.

EIC Screening, nothing further has been heard, the next meeting is in March. Chris Read has applied to join the Forum and is likely to replace Tony Vickers once he retires next year.

MOWN Verges, Laura Buck supplied a map to the Forum indicating areas currently being mown. Jan stated that she can supply photographic evidence indicating areas actually in use to add to those already being cut if that is appropriate. Thanks to Laura for following this up and reporting back.

5. Round-up Reading Borough Council.

The report has been circulated prior to the meeting. The main challenges at the moment are lack of staff and legal representation being tied up elsewhere so unable to resolve ROW issues. Flooding in Reading is currently taking priority over everything else. Forum review process has helped to bring ROW network to the forefront.

6. Round-up Wokingham Borough Council.

The report has been circulated prior to the meeting. Route B of the Greenways is currently the only one ongoing and DMMO applications are being handled within timescales, mainly regarding upgrading of bridleways. Consultants are currently assessing the evidence once reported it will be reviewed by the PROW team. Deadline by the Government is mooted to have been removed, but not appeared in writing therefore work should continue under current deadline. Huge pressure on the team as the senior position is still not filled. Weather has obviously impacted hugely on maintenance needs.

Jan has written to CEO Wokingham stating the lack of representation on the Forum in an effort to encourage attendance. As a resident of Wokingham, rather than a member of the Forum, she is able to request the position be reallocated halfway through the current incumbent's term of office believed to be 2 years.

Verge cutting already discussed. It comes under the Highways team and is outsourced by them.

Wokingham Manor Farm is currently being used behind locked gates possible trespassing. Planning is working with consultees, and Connor is due to meet with some of them soon. Bridleways are officially out of use at this time.

Once the meeting with consultees has taken place a planning application will be submitted for a ROW.

7. Round-up West Berkshire District Council.

The report has been circulated prior to the meeting. Many resurfacing works have been completed. Streatley FP21 has again been delayed due to a very wet winter, bridge work was unable to begin due to flooding.

8. BHS Pilot Campaign for Footpath Review.

Thank you to Nicola for creating a thorough document looking to bring together the ROW system each council is responsible for. Targeting connection routes, active travel and recreation. Eling Way in West Berkshire is a good example of best practice, but very much dependent on landowners.

Support from the Forum on the concept of the campaign has been agreed.

Nicola has sent out 120 emails to a diverse range of community groups and will collate the responses then contact the Councils asking what they are going to action and their timescales for doing so. Jan asked about the strategy and Nicola stated a pilot would take place in Wokingham to gauge opinion.

Defra Land Use Consultation, Forum to respond by 23 April.

ACTION: Simon to collate responses from the Forum and respond by the deadline.

9. West Berkshire ROWIP.

The report has been circulated prior to the meeting.

ROWIP still not adopted but is in use. Physical copy of an A5 leaflet showing the highlights of the ROWIP will be available shortly.

There are 54 objectives. Some aspects of the ROWIP relating to easier access are that there will be new paths created relevant to disabled access together with upgrades of structures, including equestrian gates.

WBDC are seeking a volunteer to run the volunteer scheme. Matt Walters discussed the opening of the Snelsmore Link that opened just before Christmas and is in regular use.

There was Forum support for publicising permitted paths where there is an agreement in place, WBDC to consider this. There was also support for use of footpaths by others, e.g. cyclists, where the footpath provided a valuable link.

10. Monitoring PROW aspects of Major Developments.

Tony has submitted this paper to raise a discussion within the Forum. PROW teams are being consulted on temporary closures at very short notice. TRO's are put in place instead of the developers using a Banksman or other measure to keep PROWs open during construction. Tony also suggested that there is a stakeholder group for new developments, dealing with such matters so they are addressed before the opportunity to influence things has passed. Elaine suggested a new planning informative to require that the default position should be that PROWs are accommodated.

Action EC - send the idea for a new Informative to the WBDC planners.

11. Disabled Access and other Working Groups.

As previously stated Streatley FP21 is still ongoing due to very wet weather this winter. Margaret and Helen are very happy to assess current footpaths in use that may have access issues. Please let them know they are happy to test routes with the Trammer within Reading and Wokingham areas as well as West Berkshire.

12. Cross Boundary Liaison.

Reports received were all circulated prior to the meeting.

Local Access Chair meetings are not currently taking place due to the lack of a coordinator.

13. West Berkshire Commons.

Reports received were circulated prior to the meeting.

Jon Ford has agreed to report on Bucklebury Common activities.

14. Horizon Scanning.

The Climate and Nature bill has been adjourned and is unlikely to be given any further Parliamentary time.

AOB

NW Downs Natural Landscape, updating management plans within the next 2 weeks.

Followed by a 6 week consultation period. As it falls between meetings there maybe a need for an extra meeting. Simon to advise.

Janice has suggested the reinstatement of site visits and/or speakers.

Visit to Streatley FP21 once complete and Snelsmore Link Path are 2 options.

Meeting Finished at 17.06

Upcoming Meetings

Wednesday 21st May in West Berkshire

Wednesday 24th September in Wokingham