

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting of the Forum
Held Online via Zoom
2 pm Wednesday 22nd September 2021

Present: Simon Pike (Chair), Margaret Pawson, Jan Heard, Graham Smith, Helena Barker, Angus Ross, Janice Bridger, Julian Le Patourel, Mark Bullen, Sharon Bovingdon. Tony Vickers, Nicola Greenwood.

In Attendance: Sandra Griffin (Secretary), Elaine Cox (WBDC), Andrew Fletcher (WBC), Natalie Lucas (RBC), Lillian Green (Transport Planner - RBC). Graeme Collins (TRF), Connor Clark (WBC), Steve Vale (Ramblers)

Apologies for absence: John Walmsley, Carole Ruse, Donald Peck, Roger Penfold

Local authority notation: WBC - Wokingham Borough Council.

WBDC - West Berkshire District Council.

RBC - Reading Borough Council.

Prior to the meeting Simon Pike gave a brief demonstration of a free website for possible use by the Forum. He explained its simplicity to update and the minimal cost.

A discussion as to what to include on the new website decided that agendas and minutes initially. Facebook page will continue alongside the new website.

WELCOME TO FORUM MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

Simon Pike welcomed members and members of the public and asked everyone to introduce themselves and the group they represent.

It was agreed that members of the public are welcome to contribute to the discussion, but they are asked to wait until Forum members have had their say.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

No questions.

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

Sharon Bovingdon - Landowner Item 15,

Simon Pike - WB Local Plan & Streatley Youth Hostel AOB.

3: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM MAY 2021 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

Circulated and updated prior to meeting.

WORKING METHODS OF THE FORUM.

Action 4: Ongoing due to current changes in the ROWIP

PRIORITIES OF THE FORUM.

Action 5: Ongoing, Simon Pike to write to both West Berks and Reading

WEST BERKS ROWIP UPDATE by Sharon Bayne (Consultant).

Action 6: Zoom meeting taken place. Item closed.

POLICY FOR SOLAR FARMS.

Action 7: Ongoing. Apology from Simon to Jan for not pursuing, Jan stated that updating the policy should be given priority.

STREATLEY YOUTH HOSTEL UPDATE.

Action 8: See paper - AOB.

MOWN VERGES.

Action 9: Jan Heard, Andrew Fletcher and Emma (WBC) See item 7 of September 2021 meeting.

AV VEHICLES - FINAL SUBMISSION.

Item closed

MEETING DATES FOR 2022

WEDNESDAY 26TH JANUARY - READING

WEDNESDAY 25TH MAY - NEWBURY

WEDNESDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER WOKINGHAM

4: WORKING METHODS OF THE FORUM.

The adoption of this document remains under discussion due to concerns raised by Jan Heard regarding the decision making between meetings and reference to the Statutory Guidance by Elaine Cox, this being very restricted, further drafting to continue.

ACTION 4: Simon Pike and Jan Heard to continue drafting.

5: PRIORITIES OF THE FORUM.

Formal adoption is pending changes in the 2 ROWIP's, West Berks and Reading currently being updated.

ACTION 5: Agenda for next meeting.

6. GREENWAYS UPDATE.

Andrew Fletcher gave a brief round-up of the current areas of work and shared with the Forum various pages from the website. Questions from the Forum included any changes that might affect TRO's and surfacing to be used for the new areas. Jan Heard is keen to learn more about the changes affecting FP3 and 4. Too late for comment by the Forum regarding FP3 but FP4 has not yet reached the planning stage, Jan will liaise further with Andrew.

ACTION 8: Andrew Fletcher to continue to keep the Forum informed.

7. MOWN VERGES.

Jan Heard outlined progress following a site meeting. Some ROW are covered in wild flowers, mowing is continuing in Wokingham despite staff shortages. Tony Vickers commented that in West Berkshire BBOWT have a project that ROW must be preserved over wildflowers. However, environmentalist may not consider this a priority. In order for the Forum to advise/comment in future more knowledge is needed.

ACTION 7: Tony Vickers to ask BBOWT to speak at a future meeting.

8. DRAFT WALKING & CYCLING NETWORK, WOKINGHAM.

Rob Curtis, Transport Planning Team, WBC shared a presentation prepared by WSP, consultants highlighting the depth of the scheme. Following the responses, a draft cycle network will be consulted on in the winter, ready for report early 2022.

Jan Heard has been collating comments from the Forum for the secretary to send as a formal response. Tony Vickers mentioned concerns that WBDC had experienced particularly with its narrow focus and Janice Bridger mentioned that horse riders do not seem to be considered in LCWIPs. Finally, Graeme Collins (TRF) asked if any assessment had been made concerning disadvantaging particular groups.

ACTION 8: a Sandra Griffin (Secretary) send formal response to Rob Curtis
b Andrew Fletcher to pass on concerns from Janice and Graeme to Rob

9. WEST BERKSHIRE ROWIP

Consultation has now ended and Sharon Bayne, is currently trawling through the results, once completed the Forum will be consulted formally. Due to timescales this will need to be between meetings, Forum to be informed of the process and timescales by email. Public consultation is due to begin March 2022.

ACTION 9: Elaine Cox to inform the Forum of process and timescales.

10. ACCESSIBILITY IN THE ROWIP

Margaret Pawson and Helena Barker have met with Sharon Bayne, Consultant, sharing information from other interested groups e.g., Age UK and Vision and recommended that Sharon looks at Bucks ROWIP showing details of access improvements like removing stiles and using gaps/gates instead. They also pointed out that there is no link of the WBDC website showing accessible ROW.

11. READING ROWIP

Response from the Forum has been formally accepted following comments collated by Julian Le Patourel. Lilian Green, Transport Planner, RBC, is currently working on a summary of the results which will be published on the website. Draft ROWIP will follow possibly by January 2022.

ACTION 11: Julian to alert forum of the update on the website.

12: EQUINE CENSUS 2021

Nicola Greenwood has undertaken a thorough census that replaces the previous version from 2012 on behalf of the BHS. It discusses in detail the income generated by equestrians and the knock-on effect to local areas, estimated to be in the region of £22 million per annum. Unfortunately, it can be shown that money is going out of the WBC area due to fragmented bridleways. West Berkshire is slightly different in that there are many racing stables therefore not needing access to bridleways. Tony commented that the BHS should share the data more widely. Jan wishes to thank Nicola for the huge task undertaken. She also said a follow up survey will ask more specific questions like where horses are kept e.g. livery yards or paddocks and if hacking areas are near to these locations. Janice also pointed out that one horse can often have more than one rider. Horse trekking is rarely considered by new developments of housing. Very useful data now that the ROWIPs are being updated.

ACTION 12: Nicola to share results of the survey once known.

13. PUBLIC ACCESS & ELMS

Janice provided a thorough paper outlining the initiative. The Forum had previously commented positively for landowners to gain rewards for providing access. Some discussion followed regarding the document circulated by Sharon showing little appetite from farmers to engage with the new scheme. Tony commented that ELMS and the Agricultural Bill need to support the local economy and farmers.

ACTION 13: Forum to consider its stand as to whether we support finance for permanent access should anyone ask.

14. SNELSMORE LINK

Situation regarding the crossing is ongoing, slightly more optimistic than previously. There is another site meeting coming up, an additional Forum member maybe useful to attend.

ACTION 14: Action ongoing for Janice. She will appeal for additional Forum members when required.

15. UPDATES ON LONG STANDING RIGHTS OF WAY ISSUES.

1. Shaw 3/1. WBDC is working with the landowner who has agreed that once baling is complete, he will move the gate to create a corral to move walkers/riders around the slurry. There will be a meeting again on-site just before the gate is moved. **Ongoing Action**
2. Broad View Farm. Elaine Cox stated that a formal diversion application has been submitted and is being processed. **Ongoing action.**
3. Streatley FP21. Ecological survey is the first step towards progress once obtained then engineers can provide a costed scheme. Margaret is adamant that 70% of the path is walkable. It is included in the WBDC Capital Programme for 2022. Mind the Gap has funding available following electrification of the line. Elaine Cox to approach regarding funding. **Ongoing action.**

16. DISABLED ACCESS WORKING GROUP.

Angus Ross pointed out that Wokingham makes no mention of accessibility in the Greenways scheme, Andrew asked that Margaret and Helen keep him informed of proposals in West Berkshire that may be transferrable. 2 areas in West Berkshire, Greenham Common and Discovery Centre in Thatcham, may benefit from the availability of a Trammer for use by disabled visitors.

17. CROSS BOUNDARY LIAISON.

Hants: See report, it is pleasing to see our policy on Solar Farms has informed them.

Oxon: No report

Wilts: Graham attended a meeting in June, they had an excellent presentation from the Police Rural Crime Unit

18. WEST BERKSHIRE COMMONS.

Bucklebury: WBDC is in contact with the local police arranging 2 education days and working with the estate to improve signage to help people remain on the path.

Snelsmore: See report

Wokefield: At the AGM held in July at the Dragonfly Pond Simon Barnett, BBOWT, detailed various work they had completed on the common. This included; improvements to the Easy Access Route. They have also gained agreement from Highways and sourced some funding to make improvements to the sight lines where the Bridleway crosses the very dangerous Goring Road.

Greenham & Cookham: Park run is a victim of its own success. Ways are being considered to limit numbers and try to keep participants from the local area. Negative impact on livestock and immediate area.

18. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AND HORIZON SCANNING.

Jan commented, the Law Commission might come back to us regarding AVs. For further comment.

19. NEW LAF WEBSITE

Following the demonstration at the start of the meeting it was agreed to set up a dedicated website.

ACTION 19: Simon Pike to keep Forum informed

19. ISSUES DEALT WITH BY EMAIL SINCE JANUARY MEETING.

If anyone requires any further information please email the Sandra Griffin, Secretary or Simon Pike, Chair.

20. AOB.

West Berks Local Plan now postponed indefinitely due to change in framework.

Ramblers documented routes have now been added and the site can now be annotated.

(Council officials may like to look at their own area).

Streatley Youth Hostel is seeking to raise funds.

Lawrence's Lane, Thatcham change to a quiet road has been put to one side following the arrival of a traveller encampment.

Press article commenting that WBC have been successful at applying for funding.

Meeting closed at 17.07