

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting of the Forum
2 pm Wednesday 20th September 2023

Present: Simon Pike (Chair), Margaret Pawson, Jan Heard, Helena Barker, Mark Bullen, Sharon Bovingdon, Tony Vickers, Nicola Greenwood, Donald Peck,

In Attendance: Sandra Griffin (Secretary), Elaine Cox (WBDC), Natalie Lucas (RBC), Andy Glencross (WBC)

Apologies for absence: Janice Bridger, Angus Ross, Graham Smith, Wayne Smith

Local authority notation: WBC - Wokingham Borough Council.

WBDC - West Berkshire District Council.

RBC - Reading Borough Council.

Simon Pike welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves to Andy from WBC.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

No questions.

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

Simon Pike - 'Visorando' - Thames Valley circular Walks contributes under pen name of 'Berkshire Walker'

Sharon Bovingdon has an ongoing diversion of a PROW.

3: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM MAY 2023 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

MAY MEETING: ACTION 2 MEMBERSHIP ONGOING - 3 POSSIBILITIES.

Natalie CIC interested in joining the LAF will present at January's meeting.

Town and Manor of Hungerford representative - Simon liaising.

Earley parish councillor enquiry had been received.

Andy Glencross raised query as to whether we have any political representation but was assured that this is not the case, an appointment from each Local Authority can be made regardless of political party.

Elaine clarified appointments and suggested that a member from the body that represents parish councils, The National Association of Local Councils, offer one person to join the LAF.

Margaret mentioned that many parish councils replied to the draft ROWIP indicating their interest.

ACTION Both Andy Glencross and Elaine Cox to follow up Parish Council representation.

4. GREENWAY ROUTE B

This is ongoing, the surfacing and bridge sections are nearly complete. The long-distance path is currently on hold due to lack of capital funding. Review of the Greenways has been undertaken and it is still regarded as relevant. Margaret offered her ongoing services as 'accessibility consultant'. Bridges are compliant with the Disability Act.

Janice questioned the compatibility of Planning and PROW with the current Local Plan out for consultation and the emphasis on active travel generally assumed to be walking and cycling.

5. MOWN VERGES

The consultation surrounding mown verges has just closed in WBC, Jan Heard suggested that if it was not too late for the Forum to contribute, she would draft a document indicating the joining of PROW's for the benefit of PROW users, particularly by cutting appropriately. Currently the cutting seems to be for the benefit of the establishment of wild flowers.

ACTION: Jan to draft a document for comment and send it to Andy Glencross.

6. DMMO SCOPING

The paper thoroughly covers the issues highlighted, the question is will the Forum actually support it? Currently there is a fragmented network in WBC. Deadline has been moved to 2031 but due to issues still outstanding it could still revert to 2026 when some ROW may be extinguished overnight. Donald Peck has some routes he is actively investigating and asked what does Forum support look like? Simon stated the Forum will need to agree the proposals at a meeting, then Local Authorities will be required to have regard to it. A paper could be created for a meeting to discuss the significance of the paths in question.

ACTION: Donald Peck and Nicola Greenwood to create a paper for a future meeting.

7. WBDC NEW ACCESS AND IMPROVEMENTS.

Elaine Cox supplied photographs and went on to discuss various new access links recently completed. Helena asked why the new road from Greenham to Pyle Hill has gates installed, surely gaps at either end are sufficient? Elaine will check and come back to the Forum with an answer. Janice feels that Shaw 3 has been dropped by the Forum, the tenant has agreed to move the feeding troughs however this has not yet been achieved. Tony flagged up another potential issue around the Kintbury tow path area, where an attempt is being made by a prominent private owner to close the tow path due to a potential security issue. There is historic evidence to show it may be a 'lost way'.

ACTION Elaine to check up issue raised regarding gates.

8. IMPLEMENTATION OF DEFRA'S PRESUMPTION GUIDANCE

A Government paper had been produced, which included guidance from the Landowners' point of view. There will be further legislation in the coming months (no real time specified)! Sharon commented that Janice had been a massive help regarding the gates for her diversion case.r. Janice's patience and communication was really appreciated. Donald, and comments from Janice, stated that extinguishment may effectively take place if there is an alternative route nearby even if it's an unsuitable route i.e. horses on a road. It will need to satisfy the same sort of tests as before therefore the new Guidance is not going to change very much.

9a. WEST BERKSHIRE ROWIP (DRAFT).

The need for various points of clarity discussed including Commons, Cycling, Motor Vehicle use, role of the Parish Councils to maintain paths, accessibility on the network. It was also noted there is not a single reference in the current document referring to Access land.

ACTIONS: Jan Heard supply notes re cycling, Mark Bullen supply notes re motor vehicles, Elaine supply a copy of relevant parts of the WBDC Conditions Survey.

9b. AGREE ADDITIONAL MEETING FOR ADVICE.

Forum to send comments to Simon who will compile a document for discussion at an online meeting to be held shortly, date to be advised. Current actions are broad based and generally come out of the evidence gathered in consultation. WBDC are seeking quantifiable targets and intend to review targets with the Forum every 1/3 years. Be mindful of how achievable the targets are, also the state of the capital budget currently.

ACTION: Simon to collate comments from Forum and set a date for an online meeting.

10. STREATLEY FP21

1. Environment Agency approval (sought in April) was finally granted about 10 days ago for the stock-proof fencing and bridges.
2. The path will be cleared of vegetation next week- at this stage the Definitive line will not quite be followed where there is still a log pile and thickets of brambles.
3. Safety tree works will be taking place very soon - the bat survey is complete. Note that the tree works are the recommendation of the Tree Officer and will involve the felling of two mature live Ash (diseased at the bases) and one mature dead Poplar. The wood will be chipped and removed from site.
4. A quotation is being obtained for the new bridges, planned for installation following the tree work and path clearance.
5. Elaine is arranging to meet The Swan Hotel on site to decide on the position of the new fence between the path and the meadows. The aim is to acquire as much path width as possible but The Swan will not offer much beyond the legal extent of the path (1.5m but varying in its distance from the adjacent existing fence).
6. The stock proof fencing work and clearance of logs and brambles from the path will take place from the end of October. Opaque section of fencing (where the path overlooks the Local Wildlife Site meadow), not to be implemented because would prefer to rely on the responsible behaviour of path users here.

Margaret Pawson suggested the May meeting visit could be to STRE21, Elaine said she would see if the Morrell room was free for the LAF meeting.

ACTION 10: Elaine/Secretary to check availability of the Morrell Room in Streatley for the May 2024 meeting.

11. DISABLED ACCESS REPORT.

The ROWIP document stated that the WBDC Condition Survey could identify paths suitable for people with mobility issues/pushchairs, Margaret Pawson suggested a group of the Forum could look at this and Elaine agreed to supply a copy of relevant parts of the Survey.

ACTION 11: Elaine to supply a copy of relevant parts of the Condition Survey.

12. CROSS-BOUNDARY LIAISON.

All reports received have been circulated prior to the meeting.

Jan Heard offered her time to represent the Forum in cross boundary liaison with Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

This just leaves the Oxfordshire area without a Forum representative.

13. COMMONS REPORTS

Greenham Common: 3 issues mainly, firstly managing the relationship between graziers and other users, secondly, the Council's responsibility to maintain SSI's and finally the resumption of the Saturday morning park run that is now better managed.

Finally, the amount of public access with dogs not on a lead is also an ongoing issue. Janice commented that Forum members support a constitution for Padworth and Bucklebury Commons to ensure particular interest groups are not able to sway decisions in their favour.

ACTION: Simon Pike to message Paul Hendry, Countryside Manager, WBDC regarding the constitutions of the above commons.

Other Commons reports circulated prior to the meeting.

14. AOB.

Simon suggested the Forum may be interested in local walks published on Visorando, for which he is a contributor.

Ducks Nest planning application ongoing.

Lawrences Lane, Thatcham TRO, withdrawn.

Streatley Youth Hostel is being sold.

West Berkshire Local Plan, inspection in public deferred until Jan/Feb 2024.

Planning Application for North Thatcham Country Park has been withdrawn.

Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre and Snelsmore Common have Trampers available for public use.

WBDC appreciates the work of the Forum.

Meeting closed at 17.02

Meeting Dates for 2024

Wednesday 24th or 31st January - Reading. **Simon please advise.**

Wednesday 22nd May - Newbury hoping to be held in Streatley

Wednesday 25th September Wokingham