

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting of the Forum Wednesday 14th May 2025

Present: Simon Pike (Chair), Helena Barker, Jon Ford, Sharon Bovingdon. Tony Vickers, Nicola Greenwood, Donald Peck, Helen Tranter
Cllr Nigel Foot, Portfolio Holder for Countryside (WBDC).

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

Apologies for absence: Jan Heard (Vice Chair), Janice Bridger, Margaret Pawson, George Cummings, Connor Clark (WBC) Laura Buck (WBC)

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

Simon Pike welcomed everyone to the meeting and suggested everyone introduce themselves, he then welcomed Helen Tranter to her first meeting.

2. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

No questions.

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

Simon Pike, Thatcham Town Councillor, Planning & Highways re Local Plan.

Simon Pike, North Wessex Downs Natural Landscape.

Tony Vickers, Vice Chair, North Wessex Downs, Land use Framework.

Cllr Nigel Foot, Planning at WBDC.

4: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 2025 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

*ITEM 4 AOB JANUARY 2025, Simon to create a questionnaire regarding meeting times: **OUTSTANDING***

ITEM Matters arising September 2024, Open Access Land, Matt Walters (WBDC) asked to review, however PROW/highway network is forming currently effective access points so not a particular priority in West Berkshire.

AOB JANUARY 2025, LAWRENCES LANE TRO, Simon will seek further information at an upcoming meeting and report back.

5. ROUND-UP READING BC.

Nothing new to report. Flooding has been resolved, and staffing is an ongoing concern.

6. ROUND-UP WOKINGHAM BC.

Report from Laura Buck who was unable to attend the meeting.

Verge Cutting

I have been informed by our grounds maintenance team that the first cut of the year is coming to an end. I am waiting to hear if the verges that were previously discussed were included in the cut so in the meantime if Wokingham LAF members have been out and have found otherwise I would advise them to raise them through our online reporting system: [Report overgrown vegetation and grass sight line](#)

[issues](#) as this will help to identify the areas again with our grounds maintenance team. In the meantime, I will continue to request an update from them as well.

Working with Ramblers

The team have recently been working with Loddon Valley Ramblers and have provided a grant for them to support with carrying out some sign improvements along the network. We look forward to seeing these come forward over the coming months

Maintenance

Recent maintenance work has included:

- New bridge on a footpath in Winnersh FP8
- Boardwalk in the Coomes Arborfield FP 11

Upcoming maintenance work includes:

- Resurfacing works with scrape and rolls and new material being added to Doles Lane (Wokingham Byway 28) , Range Road (Finchampstead Byway 43) and Roman Ride (Finchampstead Byway 31A).

Member participation

I am pleased to say that I have discussed the LAF with our new portfolio holder, Executive Member for Environment and Climate Emergency, Cllr Katrin Harding, who has advised that she is keen and enthusiastic about engaging and attending the LAF meetings going forward. Would you kindly start including Katrin into the invite circulation: Katrin Harding Katrin.Harding@wokingham.gov.uk. The only concern raised by Katrin in terms of attendance is her need to generally collect her daughter from pre-school at 3pm. Katrin may be able to find the occasional childcare cover however she has asked if there is any flexibility in the times for the LAF meetings going forward? For example, is there any chance the meeting could be scheduled to end by 2:30pm? Or in the morning from 9:30 is also fine. I wasn't sure if this was possible however I said I would mention the concern to see if this can be accommodated.

7. ROUND-UP WEST BERKSHIRE DC.

Improvements to various footpaths in the area including Speen Moors FP2/3 and 2/4 making it a more accessible and enjoyable area to walk. Cold Ash FP15/1 has been improved using local road planings for the surface. Mend the Gap funding has been received for fencing alongside STRE FP21 and WBDC has submitted an expression of interest to Mend the Gap for funds to shore up the banks along STRFP24. Much work has also completed by the Ramblers volunteers, who receive training on the use of specialist equipment from WBDC.

8. BHS PILOT CAMPAIGN RESPONSE.

Unfortunately, due to pressure on the Chair the deadline for responding to the campaign was missed and has now been extended for the final time. Some discussion ensued as to how best to support the Chair to negate this situation from happening again. The Forum confirmed its support for the campaign and will submit a response within 2 weeks.

ACTION: Chair to seek views of the Forum and submit response within two weeks.

9. WEST BERKSHIRE ROWIP.

The Operations Board have requested a simplified delivery plan for their next meeting in early July before adopting the ROWIP. Some actions have now been combined for

simplicity, whilst maintaining the underlying principles. Once adopted, annual SMART targets against the actions will be set and will be shared with the Forum and Portfolio holders for comment.

10. SANDLEFORD LINKING PATH PROPOSAL.

Donald Peck is seeking the support of the Forum for a safe crossing of the A339 to enable the safe linking of the Wash Common side of the A339 allowing access through to Greenham Common. Land owned by the developers Bloor Homes, have an obligation to create access. There is an existing track that would need adopting as a PROW and signage installed.

ACTION: Tony Vickers to follow up with the Stakeholder group and Bloor Homes. Elaine Cox to take up the idea internally within WBDC.

11. MOWN VERGES.

Jan submitted a paper in her absence and since noticed that the WBC Countryside team have begun work on the Reading Road route, and the result looks very good. She wishes to pass on her thanks to the team. WBDC stated that after the explosive growth last year, the dry weather this year has been a lot more manageable for keeping growth under control. The countryside team now have a specialist tractor to aid the team on managing road verges.

12. WEST BERKSHIRE LTP.

The Forum responded to the draft plan in 2023, there appears to be no reason to update the comments at this time. However, the document will be recirculated by Simon for comment prior to responding by the **deadline of 25th May 2025**.

ACTION: Simon Pike to re circulate the document for comment and then submit by the deadline.

13. ELING FARM PLANNING APPLICATION.

Simon circulated a map to clearly indicate the route of the historic track. This is not a bridleway and cannot easily be walked. Following his investigation Simon has concluded that the Forum has no need to comment.

14. DISABLED ACCESS WORKING GROUP.

Report submitted nothing further to add. Margaret and Helena are still seeking routes to explore from an accessible standpoint, Elaine suggested they consider the issue from their point of view and report back to the Forum. Speen Moors, Newbury is moving towards being a fully accessible 3 mile circuit, with sections having recently been upgraded.

15. CROSS BOUNDARY LIAISON.

Reports have been circulated prior to the meeting. Bracknell Forest report attached to these minutes.

16. WEST BERKSHIRE COMMONS.

Reports circulated prior to the meeting.

17. HORIZON SCANNING.

West Berkshire Local Plan Review, Inspector has submitted the final report for the next full council meeting on 10th June. Inspector has agreed 4 main sites for housing development, 3 in Thatcham and 1 in Greenham. In NE Thatcham the development needs a masterplan to include the creation of PROW's in the new country park. Nigel Foot asked if there was any mention of nature corridors. There is some concern from Bucklebury about the potential pressure created from the creation of a country park.

Mend the Gap funding update- Elaine is in close consultation with them and stated there is a shift towards access and not just conservation.

18. CONSULTATIONS SINCE LAST MEETING.

Thank you to everyone for their comments and particularly to Simon and Janice as main contributors.

19. AOB.

Jan has suggested she represent the Forum as a cyclist during the Consultation on the Hall Farm site, the Developers Consultants have agreed to include her when they consult with Equestrian users. Seeking approval from the Forum to represent them at Wednesday's meeting? Unanimous approval from the Forum.

Tony Vickers said that on account of his appointment as Chairman of WBDC, he was stepping down from the LAF and the Greenham Commission, so WBDC representative replacements need to be found.

Meeting closed at 1700.