

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

TUESDAY, 26TH NOVEMBER, 2019

At 6.30 pm

in the

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL,

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART I

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGE NO</u>
5.	<u>ACCESSIBILITY AUDITS WORKING GROUP</u>	1 - 6

This page is intentionally left blank

Accessibility Working Group Report for LAF meeting 26 November 2019

Purpose of Report

To set out the findings from the footpath survey of Battlemead Common undertaken by the Accessibility Working Group and to make a number of recommendations for future action.

Recommendations

1. That subject to any comments made by the LAF, further surveys and reports on of the Green Way and other relevant locations use the same methodology and report format as Battlemead Common
2. RBWM consider the needs of people with disabilities in all footpath design and improvement programmes.
3. That in view of its historical importance and in order to complete a circular walking route for people of all abilities RBWM consider opening up of the Causeway Path across Battlemead Common subject to any significant findings from the over-wintering bird survey.
4. RBWM consider the proposals in this report for the location of benches, signage and information boards on Battlemead Common.
5. RBWM consider adopting the footpath signage system used by the South Downs National Park for all 'parkland' and formally named routes such as the Millennium Walk; the Maidenhead Boundary Walk; and the Green Way.
6. RBWM consider what path surfaces might be used to enable people with disabilities to use parts of the rights of way network and in what circumstances they might appropriately be used.

1. Background

1.1. Battlemead Common was one of two pilot areas (the other being the Green Way) agreed by the Local Access Forum to be surveyed as part of its initiative to improve access to public rights of way for people with disabilities. The purpose of the surveys is to assess the suitability of the chosen PROWs for access by people with disabilities; to suggest what provisions and facilities might be made to improve access; and to identify any broader issues that might arise.

1.2. Battlemead Common was purchased by the Royal Borough in December 2018 as public open space. It comprises some 110 acres and lies between the Lower Cookham Road and the River Thames. It was formerly part of White Place Farm and used for agricultural purposes. There are three main areas: the East Field, bordering the Thames; the West Field bordering the Lower Cookham Road; and the smaller North Field adjoining Widbrook Common. The area is mostly reclaimed pasture land together with some woodland and wetland. It is crossed by the White Brook, which eventually runs into The Cut south east of Maidenhead via Maidenhead Town Centre. There

are also some lakes and ponds in the area. The Common has much of interest and value. It has a rich flora and fauna and an interesting ownership history. The Common is crossed by the Maidenhead Boundary Walk and the Millenium Walk by way of the Causeway Path. There are very fine views to Cliveden from some locations.

1.3. The Royal Borough is intending to install a small car park and has opened up a number of permissive paths. Access to the East Field is currently not allowed, pending completion of an over-wintering bird survey in early 2020. A final footpath network cannot be agreed until this survey is completed.

Responsibility for the development and management of Battlemead Common rests with the Royal Borough, who have established a Friends of Battlemead Common forum to advise on this: all decision making powers remain with the Royal Borough.

2. Summary of survey findings

2.1. Survey details are appended to this report.

2.2. The survey was undertaken on 5 November 2019. Conditions were dry but there had been rain for a number of days before the survey and underfoot conditions were wet. All existing permitted paths, with the exception of the cross field path which is unmown at present, were surveyed together with that part of the Thames Path bordering the Common. It was not possible to survey the Causeway Path since access is not currently allowed although the Path was opened for the annual Maidenhead Boundary Walk in early October, when it was walked by over 200 people.

2.3. The area as a whole is generally flat, with no significant gradients. Paths are generally in good condition and no particularly muddy areas were encountered. Path widths are good (apart from sections of the Thames Path) and no obstructions were met, other than a few tree roots that were not considered to be problematic. No facilities or footpath furniture is currently in place and signage is limited to plastic discs on fences and gateposts. Dog owners are requested to keep their dogs on leads.

2.4. In summary, the location, physical nature and history of Battlemead Common would make it an excellent walking location for many people. However, the fact that most of the footpaths at present are natural surface means that an active maintenance regime will be needed to ensure people using wheelchairs or strollers can continue to use them.

3. Broader issues arising

3.1. Routes for many/all people

If access for older people, parents with young children and people with disabilities is to have real meaning it is necessary to develop viable routes as well as assess the condition of individual paths and path sections. Although the underfoot conditions as they are at present could be challenging for some, a number of routes present themselves

Circular Walks

- A circular walk of the West Field
- A circular walk around either half of the West Field using the cross-field path.
- A longer circular walk from the Car Park to Point 4 and returning via the Thames Path and the East Field would be possible were the Causeway Path to be opened.

'There and Back' Walks

- From the parking area to Point 2 or on to the concrete bridge on Path 2 - 3
- From the parking area across the Causeway Path (currently closed) to the Thames Path

It is clear that the Causeway Path, if opened, would add significantly to the footpath network. However, we appreciate that at this stage it would only be possible to take decisions in principle and subject to future research findings.

3.2. Route signage and information

3.2.1. Everyone planning a walk needs to be able to make informed judgements about their ability to complete their chosen route. This involves considering distance, terrain and ground conditions. This is especially true for people with disabilities, who also need to consider the resting facilities as well as the factors already mentioned. A standard approach to footpath mapping, whether on-site, in hard copy, or on the RBWM website, would help greatly with this.

3.2.2. It is therefore recommended that all footpath maps on Battlemead Common (and other areas where more accessible walks are encouraged) should adopt a common format. The LAF has already seen that used by the South Downs National Park, which shows gradients, resting places and accessible gates in addition to the more usual features such as refreshment facilities. RBWM is recommended to consider adopting the same format.

3.3. Footpath surfacing

3.3.1. This is a sensitive issue and for any given path there will always be a need to strike a balance between leaving it in a natural state and surfacing or maintaining it in a particular way.

3.3.2. Whilst making no recommendations in relation to any particular path, we recommend that RBWM undertake some research into what path surfaces might be used to enable people with disabilities to use parts of the rights of way network and in what circumstances they might appropriately be used. This work should seek to identify best practice elsewhere.

APPENDIX

BATTLEMEAD PATH SURVEY DETAILS

A map showing location points is appended

1. Path 1-2 Length 400 metres

1.1. Description and condition

- The entrance gate to the Common has already been referred back to the Royal Borough in view of the poor visibility for crossing the road; unsuitable gate design; and the entrance ramp being too steep.
- The first 50 metres or so of the path from the gate have a loosely compacted stone and grit surface that does not provide a sufficiently stable base for wheelchair or walker users, particularly when very wet. The width of this section, at 1.8 metres, is adequate.
- The remainder of the path is a mown strip that is 2.4 to 2.6 metres wide. This section has vehicle tracks to each side but there is no rutting. The surface is reasonably level and somewhat tussocky.

1.2. Signage and facilities

- A bench located at B1 (SU 9015 8395) beside a gate would be a suitable resting spot for those finding the terrain difficult and provide views across the Common towards the far woodland fringe.
- A bench, fingerpost signs, a paths map could be located at B2 (SU 9031 8396). This is a key path junction and it may be that some people with disabilities will need to decide whether to continue on from here or return to the car park. The path map should show the whole site and include distances to facilitate this.

2. Path 2 – 3 Length 250 metres

2.1. Description and condition

- The path from the junction to the concrete bridge at SU 9032 8401 is a part surfaced farm track. The surface is fairly even and if properly maintained should present no major problems. The effective path width is 2.6 metres.
- The path from the bridge to Point 3 is similar in character but the surface is more uneven and muddy in parts.

2.2. Signage and facilities

- There is no need for resting facilities on this section.
- There are good views across wetlands (at this time of the year) towards the Thames from the concrete bridge. An information board about flora and fauna and possibly including a panorama view could be installed at B3.

3. Path 3 – 4 Length 450 metres

3.1. Description and condition

- Path is mown grass with a width of 2.6 metres. It is generally level but there is some unevenness due to hardcore at the start of the section and by the field entrance at SU 9053 8426, where there is also a slight dip. None of these are significant.
- The path joins the Thames Path at SU 9076 8427 and passes through a newly-planted hedge. At present the gap is 1.5 metres but this will reduce considerably as the hedge matures. A wider gap should be made.

3.2. Signage and facilities

- No resting facilities are required along the path.
- The junction with the Thames Path is a significant entry point to Battlemead. A bench could be placed at B4, along with a footpath map and general information about Battlemead in line with that provided at the Lower Cookham Road entrance.

4. Path 4 – 5 Length 700 metres (part of the Thames Path)

4.1. Description and condition

- The path is hard surfaced throughout this section, as it to the access point from the south at Islet Road. The usable width is 1.6 metres at Point 4 but this narrows to 1.0 metre at SU 9077 8418 and to 0.8 metre at SU 9076 8413. In practise, the majority of the section is only 1 metre wide or less although it could be easily widened in part. There are some tree roots in the path.
- The grass surface alongside the hedge, which runs the length of this section, has also been walked but would not be suitable for wheelchairs or strollers.

4.2. Signage and facilities

- No comments made as this section is part of the Thames Path

5. Path 2 – 6 Length 300 metres

5.1. Description and condition

- The path is a mown strip that is 2.4 to 2.6 metres wide. There are faint vehicle tracks to each side but no rutting. The surface is reasonably even but there is rubble at Point 6 that would make the going uncertain for people with mobility or visual impairment.
- Point 6 is where the Causeway Path section of the Boundary and Millennium walks begins.

5.2 Signage and facilities

- Point 6 is a key point on the site and an obvious location for benches and information boards at B5. Information could cover path routes; flora and fauna; and a panorama exposition including the water areas and Cliveden. This would also be a suitable location for a contextual map of the wider area, showing the Thames Path to Cookham and Boulter's Lock, Widbrook Common and the White Brook system into Maidenhead.

6. Path 6 – 7 – 1 Length 750 metres

6.1. Description and condition

- The path is a mown strip that is 2.4 to 2.6 metres wide with no evidence of vehicle usage. The surface is reasonably even.

6.2. Signage and facilities

- A bench located at B6 (SU 9010 8367) would provide a good resting point for those taking a short walk from Point 1 and gives a fine view of Cliveden at this time of the year.

