

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD**

**LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING MINUTES**

**5 February 2019**

**ATTENDANCE LIST**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interest area</b>
Councillor Maureen Hunt	RBWM
Councillor Malcolm Beer	RBWM
Geoff Priest	Hurley Parish Council
Dom Lethbridge	National Trust
Steve Gillions	East Berkshire Ramblers
Jason Mills	RBWM
David Gasca	Atkins
Graham Scholey	Environment Agency
Trisha Mentzel	British Horse Society
Richard Copas	Copas Farms
James Copas	Copas Farms
Ambika Chouhan	LAF Secretary
Andy Carswell	Clerk

**APOLOGIES**

**Name**  
Lisa Hughes  
Alan Keene  
Christine Gadd

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**LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**  
**5 February 2019**  
**MINUTES**

**ACTION**

**1** **Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked those present to introduce themselves. Members were reminded that the meeting was being audio recorded and this would be available on the Council website in due course.

Apologies for absence were received from Christine Gadd, Lisa Hughes and Alan Keene.

A) DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

B) MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON THE 11TH OCTOBER 2018

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed, subject to an amendment to state that Steve Gillions, rather than Christine Gadd, would be on the task and finish group for accessibility of public rights of way for those with disabilities. Cllr Hunt queried the statement under 'Matters arising from the last meeting' that it had not been confirmed if HA22 could be used for housing. Members were told that HA22 had been included in the housing site allocation and the Borough Local Plan.

C) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING

The Chairman informed members that he had written to Andrew Fletcher on the Forum's behalf to thank him for his years of service, and read out the letter that he had sent. The Chairman then read out a letter of gratitude that he had received from Andrew Fletcher in response.

Members were told that a short message of condolence had been sent to the husband of Margaret Cubley, as news of her passing reached Forum members some time later.

Dom Lethbridge informed the Forum that an agreement had been reached with the Woodland Trust about the new circular route around Cookham and Bisham, and that it was hoped that work on this could begin shortly. This would include clearance of scrubland and the installation of a new information board.

The subcommittee formed to look at access issues had not been able to meet due to Lisa Hughes' illness. Dom Lethbridge said he and Steve Gillions would try to arrange another meeting, and letting Lisa Hughes know of any outcomes via email if she was unable to attend. It was agreed to review any findings of the subcommittee at the next Forum meeting.

Regarding Site HA22, Cllr Hunt stated that she had written to the Planning Inspectorate about various issues with the land. The Inspectorate had replied that the Royal Borough should meet with the Parish Council and developers to address these. The Parish Council had met the previous week, but discussions on this issue had taken place in the private section so Cllr Hunt was unable to relay what had been talked about to the Forum. Cllr Hunt said that as HA22 was designated Open Countryside Space the developer would have to replace it; however there was nothing to suggest that the plot needed to be the same size as the previous plot. It was agreed by members to keep this item as one that required monitoring only, as the Borough Local Plan had effectively been mothballed due to the upcoming local elections.

Regarding horse riding at Ashley Hill, members were informed that there had been no further action since the last meeting and it would be brought forward as an action point only when more information became available. Members were reminded that horse riders had requested greater access to Ashley Hill, but concerns had been raised by residents about other users of the bridleway. The woodland at Ashley Hill was leased from the Forestry Commission, who had not had the time or resources to conduct health and safety checks of the site.

No dates had been set for the next LAF Chairs meeting. When confirmed, the Forum Chairman and Ambika Chouhan would attend.

Regarding establishing closer links to Surrey, it was agreed that by members that this should be done. However it had not been established whether responsibility for Surrey's LAF lay with the County Council, or if the various districts had their own.

## **2 Members update**

Members were informed that a replacement for Andrew Fletcher had been appointed and would be joining the Royal Borough with effect from February 13<sup>th</sup>. The new officer was Jackie Wheeler, who was Secretary of the LAF at Slough Borough Council. Ambika Chouhan said she would be present with Jackie Wheeler at the next Forum to ease the transition. Cllr Hunt said Ambika Chouhan had done a fantastic job of covering for Andrew Fletcher since his departure and thanked her for all of her hard work.

## **3 Presentation-Thriftwood Wetland Area Plan**

Jason Mills introduced himself to the Forum and started the presentation on the Thriftwood Wetland Area Plan. He reminded members that Ockwells Park was a designated as a local nature reserve, and had been extremely popular with visitors over the previous 30 years. In 2016 the Council had purchased a further 86 acres of land adjacent to the nature reserve, with the aim of opening this up to the public as well. A Masterplan had been drawn up to enable this. The first stage of this was to upgrade the paths to improve access, which included a small loop trail that allowed people to access a large area of bluebells. Parts of the site included designated wetlands, and Great Thriftwood itself was a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Jason Mills informed members that the Council was approached by the Environment Agency in 2017 regarding improving the drainage at the site. The site included a man-made cut that carried water along to Bray and eventually into the Thames; however the site had a tendency to collect excessive amounts of run-off from the adjacent motorway, which made public pathways impassable. This was particularly a problem in winter, but during wet spells in the summer floodwater could take several days to drain away.

An assessment of the site concluded that there was a larger opportunity to redevelop, and the Environment Agency agreed to fund a feasibility study with their project partner, Atkins. A wetland plan was in the process of being created, which would help make the whole site more accessible and make floodwaters easier to control and divert, but also help to create new and improved wildlife habitats. Jason Mills said that the design stage of the project had been funded and was due to be completed in late spring/early summer. Additional finance would be needed to implement the wetland plan, and the possibility of securing money from the Heritage Lottery Fund was being investigated. Jason Mills said that the National Trust were involved in the discussions as there was a covenant on the land. He also confirmed that the site was categorised as Flood Zone 2 in the main, with some Flood Zone 3. Jason Mills said that the preference was for all of the work to be done at the same time, but realistically it may have to be phased. This was dependant on

knowing how much the project would cost, particularly with regards to moving large amounts of earth. David Gasca of Atkins explained that one possibility that was being explored was the creation of a lake.

David Gasca said that the overall vision of the project was to create a new nature-based recreational area, but how the improved wildlife habitats would integrate with the publicly accessible areas was the main obstacle to overcome. As well as improving the existing footpaths, it was hoped that new footpaths and cycleways could be created. Two sites had been identified as being suitable for educational activity areas, to offer another dimension to the park. David Gasca said that the current plan was for all spoil removed from the site to be used to create a bund that would block out the M4. Trees could then be planted on the bund. How the work would be done was still to be determined, but David Gasca stated that he did not anticipate the park being closed in its entirety at any point to enable the works to take place.

James Copas stated that his family owned 50 acres of conservation land that was publicly accessible and popular with dog walkers. However the family had had to create a segregated area solely for wildlife so it would not be disturbed by dogs that had been let off their leads. Ambika Chouhan said there was an intention to do something similar with the redeveloped wetland area.

Jason Mills said the Royal Borough were looking at creating a parking plan, after the Parish Council raised concerns about increased traffic levels and concerns over associated parking.

Members were informed that they would be kept updated with the progress of the project.

#### **4 Presentation - Cycling Action Plan**

Gordon Oliver introduced the item and informed members that Cabinet had formally adopted the Cycling Action Plan on January 31<sup>st</sup>, which had been produced following work with the Cycle Forum. The Action Plan ensured a consistent and coordinated approach to cycling across the Borough and ensured that resources and funding would be allocated depending on need; hitherto projects and funding allocation had been done on an ad hoc basis. The Plan intended to integrate cycle routes with other forms of transport, and there had been a particular focus on linking to railways. For example a 300 space cycling hub had recently been installed at Maidenhead railway station in order to improve access to the town centre. Gordon Oliver told the Forum that when the Local Transport Plan was reviewed following the adoption of the Borough Local Plan, opportunities to integrate cycle routes into redevelopment work across the Borough would be explored.

Surveys showed that 15 per cent of Royal Borough residents cycled at least once a month, but that fewer than 3 per cent of residents cycled to work despite 36 per cent living within 5km of their workplace. Usage of cycling routes in Windsor was nearly double that of Maidenhead, despite routes in Maidenhead generally being flatter than those in Windsor. Only one in six cyclists were female. Casualty rates amongst cyclists was higher in the Royal Borough compared to the Berkshire, regional and national averages. Gordon Oliver explained that it was hoped cycling could become an established part of everyday life rather than a fringe activity enjoyed by a few. However in order to implement this there needed to be a more comprehensive cycle route system; at present there were bits missing from key areas. Another avenue to be explored was the promotion of cycling's health benefits, which was being done through improved communications with clinical groups.

A challenging objective of increasing cycle journeys by 20 per cent by 2022 from 2017, and a 50 per cent increase by 2027, had been set, along with a 20 per cent reduction in cycling casualties by 2021 compared to 2017. Schemes to promote cycling within businesses and schools had been carried out.

The Forum was told that there was a recommendation from the All Party Parliamentary Cycling Group that £10 per person per year should be spent on cycling. However this was far below the amount being spent on comparative cycling projects in the Netherlands. Potential revenue streams for this were noted by the Forum.

Surveys were carried out to monitor cycle use in the Royal Borough, and it was hoped that the surveys would show an increase in the number of female cyclists. The number of children taking part in Bikeability training schemes, and those who passed them, would also be monitored, as would resident satisfaction levels. The ten parish areas of the Royal Borough had all been profiled, and all were consistent with their relevant Local Plans. Existing cycling routes had been audited and popular cycling destinations had been identified, and £5million of high priority schemes had been identified.

Road safety analysis had been carried out which showed there was a higher casualty rate in Maidenhead. Although there were no clear patterns, there were concerns over safety of cyclists trying to cross busy A roads or pulling out at roundabouts, particularly as in certain locations there were very few cycle-only routes. Trying to cycle between Windsor and Ascot was viewed as being particularly problematic. Cllr Beer said that in many places roads were heavily used and were narrow, making it difficult for other vehicles to pass cyclists safely. Schools had been asked if they needed any improvements to cycle parking provision; all those who had said they did had now been visited by officers.

Richard Copas then gave a presentation on a proposed circular cycle route around the Cookhams, with the potential to connect it to Bourne End, Marlow and Maidenhead. It would have exit points to various sites of interest, and the local primary schools to encourage children to cycle to school. The planned route would go through land owned by five different landowners. Richard Copas said a large amount would go through land owned by the Copas family. The National Trust, which was another local landowner, had been positive in their response, as had the owner of the gravel company which stood on part of the land. However it had been hoped the path would have a tarmac surface, which had been met with some resistance from the National Trust. One of the landowners had not been spoken to about the proposals, but Richard Copas said that a footpath going across their land already existed. Consent would need to be given to allow cycles to use the paths. Members said they supported the idea of the proposals.

## **5 Consultation on existing public rights of way targets**

Members were reminded that the targets had been set 6-9 months ago, and the principles were well established. It was noted that concerns had been raised over Footpath 41, which was currently closed; however it was in the process of being rerouted.

Members thanked officers for their time in producing the review.

## **6 Recruitment Sub Team Report**

The Chairman reminded members that two meetings had had to be cancelled

in the past year, and another was nearly not quorate due to a lack of numbers. A working group had therefore been set up to look at ways of promoting the LAF and the work it did. As part of this work the group looked at how other councils publicised their LAFs. It was noted that there was nothing to promote the Royal Borough's LAF on the RBWM website. The Chairman stated he would speak to Anthony Hurst regarding the contents of the website.

The Chairman stated that the Crown Estate and College of Agriculture had both been identified as being organisations that could have representatives on the LAF. He said he was waiting to hear back from an individual from the Crown Estate who had been identified as being a suitable representative. It was hoped that the College of Agriculture would show an interest as it was hoped that some younger members could join the Forum. The clerk confirmed that the maximum number of members was 22.

The Chairman stated that he would seek to have Cllr Beer confirmed as an official member, as he attended all Forum meetings despite not being a member, and one of the officially designated RBWM members did not attend. Cllr Beer said he was happy to continue attending meetings, and stated his belief that the remit of the Forum should be formally included in the Council Constitution as it was a statutory body. He also suggested a message be sent to all Parish Councils informing them about the Forum. Cllr Beer said comments from items discussed at the Forum were not usually progressed to the Council's Cabinet, and suggested that having their recommendations looked at by a higher body might be a way of publicising the Forum.

Cllr Beer stated that a site visit of a farm was usually organised each year. James Copas said this was done through the Rural Forum, and he would be happy to let Ambika Chouhan know of potential dates of future visits.

## **7 Date of the next meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next meeting was still to be confirmed.

The meeting, which started at 5.40 pm, ended at 7.40 pm.