

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING MINUTES

26 November 2019

ATTENDANCE LIST

Name	Interest area
Lisa Hughes	User – Accessibility
Alan Keene	User
Steve Gillions	User – Walking
James Copas	Landowner
David Clenshaw	User – Walking
Councillor Phil Haseler	RBWM
Anne Woodward	User – Horse riding
Anne Keene	Observer – Horse riding
Geoff Priest (Chairman)	Hurley Parish Council, User – Young People
Trisha Mentzel	User – Horse riding
Dom Lethbridge (Vice-Chairman)	Landowner
Jacqui Wheeler (LAF Secretary)	RBWM
Wendy Binmore (Clerk)	RBWM

APOLOGIES

Name
Councillor Maureen Hunt
Christine Gadd
Lynn Penfold

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MINUTES

ACTION

- 1 Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maureen Hunt, Christine Gadd and Lynn Penfold.
- 2 Declarations of Interest**

None.
- A) APPROVAL OF MINUTES - 4TH JULY 2019

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2019 be approved.
- 3 Matters arising from the last meeting**

4.1 – Officers would bring the Cookham Cycleway back to the Forum once more progress had been made.

4.2 - Regarding the Chairs meeting, Jacqui Wheeler explained that she had emailed Surrey County Council as she was exploring links that could be formed between the two areas. She had been in touch with Joanne Porter about setting up a joint Local Access Forum Chairs meeting to discuss cross boundary issues. The previous Chairman had passed away in 2018 and he had been very involved in local access issues and it would be good to continue that work. Jacqui Wheeler had not heard back from West Berkshire Council but would continue to chase for a new date.

6.1 – Lisa Hughes commented that it was very difficult to find any information on the Council’s website regarding the Local Access Forum. The Chairman responded the Forum might need to wait until the New Year to make the website easier to navigate but he would start discussions.

6.2 – The Terms of Reference had been updated to encourage a younger, ad hoc membership. The plan was to bring someone on board with more youthful views. The Chairman stated he felt it would be nice for students to get broader views but it was difficult to find people willing to volunteer. He was hoping the head of the BCA College would attend a Hurley Parish Council meeting in December so the Chairman could discuss the issue with her then.
- 4 Members' Update**

There was no Members Update to report.
- 5 Membership and Staff Update**

Members noted that there had been no membership enquiries for the Local Access Forum. Nabihah Hassan-Farooq had left RBWM and there was a new clerk moving forward, called Mark Beeley.
- 6 Horse Riding and Multi-Use Provision - Creation of Sub Group**

LAF Horse rider members, Anne Woodward and Trisha Mentzel had both written letters to Teresa May MP about the significant issues facing horse riders in the borough such as; lack of off-road provision and road safety. Anne Woodward felt it was now too dangerous to ride on the road with access areas being closed down and riders receiving abuse for riding on the road. She

appreciated there were more footpaths and cycleways being created but, bridleways seemed outdated. Cyclists were allowed on bridleways but, riders could not use cycleways. Anne Woodward had explained this in her letter to Teresa May. The Chairman proposed setting up another working group similar to the existing Accessibility Working group which would be made up of existing LAF members together with any interested external volunteers. The new working group would focus on extending the route provision available for horse riding and creation of multi-user routes.

Anne Woodward and Trisha Mentzel volunteered to establish the new sub group with Anne stating she would like to attend a meeting of the other working group so she could see how it was structured. The Chairman responded that once the new sub group reported back to the Forum, the report could be used to gain leverage with MPs on opening up rural areas such as Ashley Hill Forest. Jacqui Wheeler confirmed she was happy to support both groups.

Furthermore, Jacqui Wheeler informed the Forum that the PROW team had received a very negative response from the temp officer at Forestry Commission concerning the necessary risk assessments being done at Ashley Hill Forest. They had point blank refused to carry them out or accept help from RBWM PROW team. The permanent Forestry Commission contact is currently on maternity leave. Jacqui would forward Forestry Commission contact details to the new sub group so they can begin putting pressure on to have the risk assessments done.

7 Accessibility Audits Working Group

Steve Gillions explained the report showed how accessibility could be improved if an agreement came forward to RBWM officers, they could look into it and try and implement it. Lisa Hughes said she was not expecting the countryside to become accessible to everyone but, some accessible routes for disabled people would be good. Steve Gillions stated as a site, Battlemead Common had high potential for accessibility for disabled people as it was quite flat and there were not many obstacles. If the Rights of Way team considered disabled needs during the design phase, it would save a lot of money in the long run. He added no one was expecting all-weather track running all the way round but, he would be asking for disabled friendly pathways and access. He was suggesting doing something similar to South Downs where they offered a map that showed where all of the facilities in their parks were so that those who were less able, or parents with prams could still access and use the facilities.

Lisa Hughes stated the information for South Downs could be found online, with signage installed on the ground. The information included step free access, some stepping, resting places, no stiles access, and least restricted access points. There were four national parks using the information formatting but, she liked the one at South Downs as it contained all the information in one document.

Councillor Haseler said Ockwells Park had 86 acres and asked if there was anything going on at that site to inform visitors. The Chairman stated this park was on this list to be audited by the accessibility working group (AWG). He added the AWG had to create a proforma of how they would review the areas for access and would also use a format for inputting into the Borough Local Plan (BLP), and if that worked, it would set the standard by people that knew what they were doing. The Chairman stated it was a good report and he had been to site and the report came across as objective.

Alan Keene said he was glad to see the Borough considering opening up the

Causeway at Battlemead and that, the Local Access Forum should be involved in that. The Forum's job was to ensure there was good access and support the opening up of the Causeway. The Chairman responded that there were ongoing ecology surveys and people were only excluded from the area due to biodiversity. Access routes including to the Causeway would be worked out once the results of ecology surveys were available. Subject to this the LAF would be looking to support more access to this area.

It was unanimously agreed to endorse the report and put the report forward to the Council and to the Friends of Battlemead group.

8 Battlemead Common Visit/Update

Jacqui Wheeler explained the four sub groups had met in October and the minutes of the previous meetings of the sub groups were included in the agenda/ dropping the name 'Common' was being discussed at the next Friends group meeting. Lisa Hughes stated all the sub groups were worried about nuisance dog owners and felt the term 'Common' would make people feel they could use it but, it was agricultural land. Jacqui Wheeler said that simply calling the land a "Common" did not give it the legal status of "Common". However, James Copas contended that the term Common did sound like anyone could use the land. The Chairman stated the Forum needed to find out why it was named that way in the first place. James Copas said people think Commons are owned by the National Trust and that that is not the case with Battlemead.

Jacqui Wheeler circulated photos of the access gate at Battlemead which had been brought up in the Battlemead accessibility sub group meeting as the opening is less than a metre wide which is not compliant with government guidance. The Battlemead accessibility sub group had agreed it needed alteration and the Council was consulting with the LAF for opinions on this issue. Lisa Hughes stated there was much better access a bit further down the road. It would save money to leave it as it was. The access point was very narrow and quite dangerous to use as it was right by a very busy road. A more suitable access point was approximately 100 metres away. The Chairman said the Borough needed to be careful because if the gate was removed, there may be objections if the Council ever wanted to have the gate reinstated; so it was better to improve it and make it more useable. James Copas said it would either need to be set back and remove the nearby tree or, just use the other entrance. The Chairman stated he felt both crossings were not safe to use, but that the gate should be left as it was and the crossing at the car park be highlighted as the accessible entrance to the site.

Jacqui Wheeler explained the map on page 32 in the agenda showed signage related to wildlife was to be installed on 31 January 2020; and page 36 of the agenda showed the minutes of the biodiversity group with recommendations at the end of the page; it set out a vision with basic principles of managing Battlemead and she wanted to bring that to the Local Access Forum to see if the Forum wanted to support the vision and have it recorded. Alan Keene said he had no objections to the points but it needed to say something about access. Steve Gillions said seasonal access needed to be based on evidence, there needed to be a balance between wildlife and access. The Chairman stated the Council did not know about the extent of the wildlife habitat when it bought the land, which has created issues regarding access to the site. He added the Forum could go back and say it supports their recommendations but it needed to say something on access and also to balance between access users and wildlife. The Local Access Forum was generally supportive but the Friends of Battlemead needed to strike a balance.

Lisa Hughes stated the volunteer sub group of Battlemead had been engaging with dog walkers to ensure their dogs were kept on leads at the site.

The Local Access Forum unanimously agreed it was happy to support the recommendations in the report.

9 Milestones Summary Report 2019

A target to carry out 10 major surface or clearance jobs was currently sitting at nine completed; the target for seven bridge repairs or replacements was currently sitting at 9 completed which exceeded the target; two new paths had been completed which was one more than the target but, only six access improvements had been completed despite the target sitting at 10 to be carried out.

The Chairman stated for a large part of the period relating to the targets, there was no designated officer in the Rights of Way Team so it was a pretty good performance seeing as the team were short staffed and the Forum was quite harsh with their targets.

10 Local Plan Further Consultation

The Chairman explained after the inspectors first review the draft Local plan had now been amended and was out for consultation again. The working group of the Local Access Forum had reviewed the original draft local plan with a view to how access could be improved. That review was submitted to the Head of Planning with the intention that it be circulated to developers. The Forum will reconvene in early 2020 to review the Forum's original report on access in relation to the developing draft local plan.

11 Future Site Visits

Forum members were made aware of an invitation for the opening of a new shared use route on the A404 near to Temple. The route was opening on 18 December 2019 at 1pm. Alan Keene stated the Bisham Parish Council felt it would be very beneficial to the local community. The status was noted as a permissive route rather than a dedicated public right of way.

Jacqui Wheeler stated there would be further site visits arranged at Cockmarsh and Thrift Wood which was the new extension to Ockwells Park and she was hoping to schedule the visits in the spring and then arrange a couple more visits in summer 2020.

12 Date of next meeting

Members noted the next schedule of meetings would be known after Full Council in February 2020.

The meeting, which started at 6.30 pm, ended at 7.55 pm.