

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING MINUTES

2 December 2021

ATTENDANCE LIST

| Name | Interest area |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Geoff Priest | Hurley Parish Council |
| Lisa Hughes | User – Walker |
| Councillor Maureen Hunt | RBWM |
| Councillor Phil Haseler | RBWM |
| Councillor Julian Sharpe | RBWM |
| Alan Keene | Bisham Parish Council |
| Steve Gillions | User – Walker |
| James Copas | Landowner |
| Susy Shearer | User – Cyclist |
| Trisha Mentzel | User – Horse Rider |
| Mark Howard | Cookham Parish Council |
| Jacqui Wheeler | RBWM – LAF Secretary |
| Mark Beeley | RBWM – LAF Clerk |

OBSERVERS

Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra

APOLOGIES

Name

Anne Woodward

Lynn Penfold

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LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
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MINUTES

ACTION

1 Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and asked those present at both York House and on the Zoom call to introduce themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from Anne Woodward and Lynn Penfold.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

A) APPROVAL OF MINUTES - 5TH JULY 2021

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th July 2021 were approved as a true record, provided the following amendments were made:

- In Item 8 – Milestones Statement, it was corrected to say: “Susy Shearer agreed with this comment and said that educating cyclists and pedestrians was also important.”
- In Item 10 – All Sub Group Meeting, it was corrected to say: “Susy Shearer said that the Cycling Action Group wanted to join up cycling provision across the whole borough and they welcomed new ideas.”

3 Matters arising from the last meeting

Jacqui Wheeler, Parks and Countryside Access Officer, said that a joint Local Access Forum (LAF) Chairman’s meeting with local authorities was still outstanding and had not yet been organised.

Councillor Sharpe asked why this had taken so long.

Jacqui Wheeler explained that she had not heard anything further from the other LAFs, there had been an initial enthusiasm for a meeting from officers and Chairman but nothing had been arranged so far.

The Chairman added that each LAF had different priorities, efforts could be made to see if a meeting could be held in the spring. Having the meeting virtually could help progress. It had been around four years since the last meeting.

Jacqui Wheeler updated the LAF on Battlemead Common, which had been approved by Cabinet in September 2021. The causeway would be due to open in April 2022 after some fencing had been put in, with planting to follow. There was an ongoing consultation with the LAF on the Milestones Statement, running totals were: 7 major surface repairs, 9 bridge repairs and 10 access improvements.

The Chairman commented that the Public Rights of Way team had done a good job under difficult and demanding circumstances.

Councillor Hunt asked if the volunteers had helped with the work the team had undertaken.

Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that the conservation volunteers from Reading had been undertaking work on things like surface repairs. They were a productive

group and were always looking for more local volunteers. Work had also been done in collaboration with the youth offending team and Ways into Work.

Councillor Sharpe asked if there was a local volunteer group in the borough which could be used.

Jacqui Wheeler said that the conservation volunteers were based in Reading but did work across Berkshire. The Windsor and Maidenhead volunteer team did work on things like nature reserves and had therefore not done much on public rights of way.

Councillor Sharpe said that RBWM did a lot of good work with volunteers and believed that some of them could be able to help with the projects that had been discussed.

4 Membership Update

The Chairman said that he had a meeting with the Berkshire College of Agriculture, where the LAF had been discussed. Windsor was slightly out of the way so they did not attend the meeting but contact details had been given to the student development officer.

Jacqui Wheeler said that she had sent out an invite to all parish councils asking them to nominate people to join the LAF. Three applications had been received, with one applicant present at the meeting. This had taken the LAF membership up to 16, there were two possible nominees from Eton, while Cox Green had shown an interest. Jacqui Wheeler said that it would be good to have more cycling representatives on the Forum.

The Chairman said one of the applications had come from Councillor Sharpe's part of the borough, which was important in ensuring that the LAF represented all of RBWM. He suggested it would be useful to add some more landowners to the Forum, there was no representative from the National Trust due to the movement of officers.

Jacqui Wheeler said that she was happy to contact the National Trust again.

ACTION – Jacqui Wheeler to contact the National Trust to see if there was a representative who could join the LAF.

5 Sub Groups Verbal Reports

The LAF considered an update from each sub group.

6 Multi-User Sub Group

Trisha Mentzel gave an update on the multi-user sub group. There had initially been a suggestion for a horse route to be created at the back of Ockwells Park, by Thrift Wood on the south side of the cut. However, this area of land was often very wet and muddy and therefore was not suitable for horse riders. The north side of the cut was more suitable and connected with another bridleway. There was difficulty getting across, there was an old agricultural bridge along with a wooden pedestrian bridge. The wooden bridge had a step up so it needed to be altered, but this would allow those in wheelchairs and horse riders to use the bridge. Jacqui Wheeler had contacted engineers at the council about this but had not yet heard back.

Councillor Sharpe asked if the bridge could be used by both disabled people and horse riders.

Trisha Mentzel said that there was the potential for both groups to use the bridge but not at the same time.

Jacqui Wheeler said that the bridge would need to be checked before any changes could be made, it was originally built for pedestrians only. Once it had been checked, horse riders would be able to use it. This showed that RBWM wanted to give horse riders permitted access to get them off the roads.

Councillor Sharpe asked why this was happening, horse riders made up a very small percentage of the population.

The Chairman explained that it was an area that could be used by horse riders and would help to get them off the road. The LAF was equal amongst all users but sharing disabled and horse access would be difficult so a lot of work would need to be done.

Councillor Haseler said that he was surprised to hear the proposals that had been outlined in the update. The last thing he had heard was that horse riders would be given permission to ride south of the cut. He felt that it would be good to consult with the two local councillors, himself and Councillor McWilliams. There had been an outcry from local residents when horse riders had been using this area in the past and therefore the LAF needed to be mindful. Councillor Haseler said that he was not against horse riders using the area, it was just important to be mindful of public expectations. Social media could be used to communicate with residents and make them aware of the changes that could happen.

The Chairman agreed that better communication was needed but clarified that the proposals were not a definite plan.

Mark Howard also agreed with the point on better communication being vital. In his area, there were not many horse riders but a significant number of cyclists and pedestrians. He felt that the focus on resources for each group should be balanced proportionally.

Lisa Hughes commented on the size of each user group being considered. 1 in 6 people in the borough had a disability and the amount of money that was provided for improvements to footpaths and pavements should therefore reflect this. Lisa Hughes lived in the north of the borough and often walked her dog in Pinkneys Green. There was a permitted path for horse riders and there had been no incidents between horses and other pedestrians. Lisa Hughes questioned what the issue was with the bridge that had been discussed, there was a small percentage of wheelchair users and they could still get out of the way if a horse was coming.

The Chairman said that everyone in the borough paid council tax and therefore all were entitled to their freedom. It could be hard to judge how many of each group there were and some parts of the borough would not be suitable for all users. Cyclists received more capital than anyone but the LAF was looking at routes where all users could use them.

Mark Howard said it was important to communicate decisions effectively on how and why they had been made, particularly justifying the financial rationale. This had been a problem in Bisham, where a large amount of money was spent on a bridleway and a number of residents had raised it as an issue.

The Chairman said he agreed with the comments on communication.

Jacqui Wheeler said that having the bridleway access on the north side of the cut was not confirmed, it was an ongoing situation. A lot of work would be needed on the south side of the cut to allow horse riders to use this land, the surface on the north side was more appropriate. The proposals would be consulted on and communicated with residents and interested parties before a decision was made.

Trisha Mentzel said that horse riding usually did not produce any incidents with other path users, so it should not be an issue in this area.

7

Accessibility Working Group

Steve Gillions explained that there had been six pilot walks on the 'Walks for All' project, which identified those parts of the network that less able people had difficulty using. The progress that had been made on the six projects was as follows:

- Boulter's Lock – survey had been completed.
- The Greenway – survey had been completed and report had been written up.
- Battlemead Common – survey had been completed but the write up had not yet been completed. Steve Gillions needed the definitive route of the Causeway path before this route could be finished.
- Cock Marsh and Ockwells Park – this was still to be completed.
- Runnymede – it was proposed that this route was deferred as the National Trust had a plan to improve all the paths in this area.

Steve Gillions explained that some of the main issues that had been encountered were path surfacing problems and levelling of steps. Any issues that had been spotted were flagged up to RBWM and they had been amended quickly. Barriers at some sites, which were used to prevent motorbikes, could also prevent those with wheelchairs or push chairs from accessing the path. The missing link at St Clouds Way was now under construction so the situation in this area had been improving. Steve Gillions believed that issues could be easily resolved if RBWM had a published standard for path construction and surfacing which could help solve problems with multi-user footpaths. Communication between departments at the council could also be improved, particularly between rights of way and highways. A published planned programme for path improvements that could be discussed before it was implemented would be useful.

Considering the Walks for All project, there were two areas where external support was needed, in mapping the routes and publishing the routes. RBWM Together would be a sensible place for the routes to be published. Steve Gillions requested that Walks for All members were allowed to meet with the Head of Transformation and the Parks and Countryside Manager to discuss the project.

Lisa Hughes passed on her thanks to Steve Gillions for completing the write ups of the various different routes that were part of the project. She explained that the routes were not linear, there were several different options that users could pick when completing a walk. For example, on the Greenway there were a number of interlinked paths which could be used. Lisa Hughes commented on a path at the back of the Braywick Leisure Centre, the path still did not have a finished surface which made it difficult for wheelchair users.

Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that the path at Braywick would be resurfaced soon which would fix the issues which had been raised.

The Chairman said that communication was important and discussions should be had with officers at RBWM on the aspects of help that Steve Gillions had requested.

ACTION – Jacqui Wheeler to investigate who at RBWM would be best to discuss publishing the Walks for All project on the website.

Councillor Sharpe asked for clarification on where the six walks were located in the borough, he felt that residents from the rest of RBWM would gain no benefit from the work that had been done. Councillor Sharpe said there was nothing south of Maidenhead and felt that it was not inclusive, the LAF was a borough wide Forum.

Steve Gillions said that there had been six pilot areas to see if the idea worked, with the aim being easy access to a central hub where walks could be started. The plan for the project was to look at other areas of the borough after the initial six walks had been completed.

Councillor Sharpe said that he knew a footpath in his ward which could do with an upgrade to allow those with disabilities to use it, he requested that this was added to the list.

The Chairman said that it depended on the council to take the project further and implement the changes that had been recommended. Parish councils had been made aware of the project but there had been little interest in the south of the borough.

Councillor Sharpe said that the project needed to be more inclusive, it was not just about Maidenhead.

The Chairman felt that Councillor Sharpe was missing the point, the north of the borough had expressed an interest in being involved in the Walks for All project, the south of the borough had not. Steve Gillions and Lisa Hughes were unable to look at paths all over the borough at this stage. If the concept could be proved as a success, it could spread its wings and encompass more of the borough.

Lisa Hughes commented that this had been raised by Councillor Sharpe at previous LAF meetings. It needed to be considered in context, Lisa Hughes said that she was disabled and a volunteer, she did not have the capability to go down to areas in the south of the borough. She felt like the comments from Councillor Sharpe had been a personal attack rather than constructive feedback.

8 Cycling Action Group

Susy Shearer gave an update from the Windsor and Maidenhead Cycling Action Group. The group had met four times since July 2021, principally to discuss the following topics:

- Ideas, information including mapping tools, in relation to the RBWM Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). This was being developed by Tim Golabek and Project Centre staff and incorporated information drawn from discussions with councillors as well as engagement events with local communities and stakeholders. Earlier in the year, a joint working party formed by Sunninghill & Ascot Parish and Sunningdale Parish Councils and led by Cllrs Ceri Richardson and

David Biggs had studied cycling issues in that part of the borough and was contributing this feedback to the LCWIP process.

- Matters related to RBWMs decision to implement PSPOs in the pedestrianised areas of Windsor and Maidenhead town centres and the implications for cycling. The group wrote to and received a written response from RBWM and were in discussions with Councillor Clark and Tim Golabek. A meeting was being planned with Officers, Councillors and W&MCAG representatives in order to discuss the matter “in the round”.
- Supported the Launch of the Windsor Cycle Hub, based at the community hub at The Swan, Clewer Village. WCH had been given outstanding support from Maidenhead Cycle Hub which included mechanic training, and was extremely grateful to receive a start-up grant from RBWM together with a grant from The Prince Philip Trust Fund. Windsor Cycle Hub currently ran a weekly ‘Bike Kitchen’ on Saturdays from 11am-noon as well as organising a programme of Led Rides which took place most Saturdays, leaving from the Swan at 11:30am and open to anyone in RBWM. It was hoped that cycle “hubs” would eventually be developed in every part of the borough.
- Cycling security and safety matters included a presentation by Jeffrey Pick the Police, Community Engagement and Resilience Officer for Windsor and Maidenhead Local Police Authority. The police had also held successful ‘Bike Marking’ sessions and hoped to be able to continue to provide these sessions at the Windsor Cycle Hub on a regular basis.

Cllr Sharpe expressed his appreciation for this report.

Jacqui Wheeler asked how far the cycling routes were which took place on Saturdays at the Swan.

Susy Shearer said that the routes were graded in terms of difficulty and were usually generally ranged between 8 and 20 miles radius from the Swan.

9 Consultation Response - Active Travel /LCWIP

The Chairman commented that some of the consultations had very short response times, which often made it difficult for the LAF to be consulted in full.

Jacqui Wheeler said that an update had been attached to the agenda from Tim Golabek on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). The plan was currently being written after responses to the consultation had been received from stakeholders and key walking and cycling routes would be developed. The LAF had received a response acknowledging that their comments had been considered. A draft of the LCWIP was not yet available but Jacqui Wheeler would be informed once it was and she would let LAF Members know. Another consultation, on the RBWM budget, had started today and details had been circulated by Mark Beeley, the clerk for the LAF.

10 Draft LAF Annual Report

The Chairman said that a report needed to be supplied to Natural England on the work of the LAF over the course of the year April 2020 to the end of March 2021. The report highlighted positive LAF activities and also plans for the future year. It was planned that the report would be submitted shortly and would also be published on the RBWM website.

11 Diversion Application Cookham FP17 & part FP59

Jacqui Wheeler explained that the Rights of Way and Highway Licensing Panel had agreed the diversion order in October 2021, contrary to officers recommendation. The diversion order would be made and a consultation on the diversion would go out for a statutory period of 28 days, in early 2022. A report would then go back to the Rights of Way and Highway Licensing Panel with any objections or support and the Panel would then decide whether to refer the matter to the Secretary of State, which could result in a public enquiry to determine the orders. The LAF would have an opportunity to respond to the consultation, a mixed response could be given if there was no consensus amongst Members of the Forum.

The Chairman said that the comments submitted from the LAF on the original application had been from himself and the Vice Chairman of the Forum. It was important to discuss the issue amongst the Forum to determine what the approach should be.

Mark Howard asked if the application was to replace a public footpath with a permitted footpath.

The Chairman said that this was correct for the original application.

Steve Gillions said that the permitted footpath would become a public right of way for mixed use. He asked if the LAF could be notified once the consultation had gone live.

Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that all LAF Members would be notified.

12 Corporate Plan Update

Jacqui Wheeler updated the Forum as the RBWM Corporate Plan had been agreed at a recent meeting of Full Council. This plan set out the council's priorities and how it would achieve change over the next five years. The plan was broken down into three key objectives on thriving communities, inspiring places, and a council trusted to deliver its promises. The full plan was available online, one of the key priorities was around climate change and allowing the natural environment to thrive, which related closely to the work of the LAF.

13 Borough Local Plan - Next Steps

Jacqui Wheeler said that the Borough Local Plan (BLP) had come together and the main modifications to the plan were currently being considered by the Planning Inspector. A report was due to be issued shortly and it was planned that the BLP would be taken to Full Council for consideration at the end of December 2021. Should it be approved, the BLP would be the primary planning document, work could then start on Supplementary Planning Documents. There were plans for stakeholder engagement events and the LAF was on the list of attendees for these events.

The Chairman said that when the first draft plan was published, the LAF went through it in detail to see where changes to footpaths had been suggested. This had been submitted to the Head of Planning at the time. The Chairman said that he hoped the LAF would be able to see the new plan and consider any changes to footpaths which had been proposed.

14 Horizon Scanning - Milestones 2022-23 Consultation in Feb 2022, Planning Consultations with LAF, Volunteers Updates

Jacqui Wheeler said that the Milestones consultation was due soon, which

would set out the council's targets and objectives for the year ahead. If there were areas for improvement, LAF Members were suggested to get in touch. The south west Maidenhead place making consultation was also coming up. The Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum were currently considering the vulnerability of public rights of way to severe weather and the impact this could have, it was something that rights of way teams needed to consider. Jacqui Wheeler suggested that any issues could be brought forward by Members to be considered by the LAF.

Councillor Sharpe said that it would be useful to circulate a briefing note covering the items discussed. It was agreed that the information would be included in the minutes.

Steve Gillions said it would be useful on the climate change issue if someone from the rights of way team brought a paper to the LAF to outline what the issues were.

The Chairman said that it was a good suggestion and could be investigated for the next meeting of the LAF in summer 2022. On the Milestones consultation, parish councils in the south of the borough would be emailed to make them aware.

Susy Shearer said that work was ongoing to produce the Biodiversity Action Plan, in conjunction with various Wild groups in the borough. She suggested it would be beneficial for the LAF to consider biodiversity and the natural environment in its work on local access issues.

Jacqui Wheeler said it would be useful to have someone who was working on the Biodiversity Action Plan attend the next LAF meeting.

ACTION – Jacqui Wheeler to invite representative from the Biodiversity Action Plan to the next meeting of the LAF.

15 Date of Next Meeting: TBC June/July 2022

Members of the Forum noted that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed after Full Council in February 2022. The exact date would be communicated by Democratic Services in due course.

The meeting, which started at 6.30 pm, ended at 8.25 pm.