

RIGHTS OF WAY & HIGHWAY LICENSING PANEL

Wednesday 29 March 2023

Present virtually: Councillors Maureen Hunt (Chairman), Samantha Rayner, Phil Haseler, Mandy Brar, Clive Baskerville and Gerry Clark

Officers in attendance virtually: Jacqui Wheeler and Becky Oates

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Muir, with Councillor Clark substituting in his place.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Haseler and Hunt declared that they had both already seen the Milestones Statement 2023/24 as they were members of the Local Access Forum.

Minutes

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2022 be a true and accurate record.

Public Rights of Way 'Milestones Statement 2023/24'

Jacqui Wheeler, Parks and Countryside Access Officer, introduced the report and stated that it was the annual Milestones Statement which was coming to the Panel for approval. There were over 310km of public rights of way in the borough which were very well used. Consultations had been carried out with the Local Access Forum (LAF), as well as Parish and Town Councils, the responses to which were set out in Appendix B.

During 2022/23, several volunteer groups worked on public rights of way, including The Conservation Volunteers, Ways into Work, Berkshire College of Agriculture and East Berks Ramblers. The value of these volunteers had been calculated at around £15,000 which was incredibly important to the team. A revenue budget of £60,000 had been allocated to the team for 2023/24, a large portion of which would be used for the vegetation clearance schedule. There had been no allocated capital budget for public rights of way work, but work was ongoing to build up the volunteers' network and sources of external funding to continue working on and making improvements to the network.

There had been a change in the wording to some of the objectives and milestones targets, detailed in the statement.

The Chair stated that she was very proud that her ward of Hurley and the Walthams had 29.9% of the public rights of way within the borough and asked how members could contact Ways into Work or whether it was for officers to contact this group.

Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that the Ways into Work team were a small, part-time team that fell under the management of Jason Mills, Natural Environment Officer, but members could reach out if they had any specific tasks that they felt the team could help with.

The Chair asked how reducing the capital budget from £40,000 to £0 would affect the work of the team.

Jacqui Wheeler stated that it would reduce the amount of work and improvement that could be carried out.

Councillor Rayner thanked Jacqui Wheeler for the report and stated that it was fantastic to offer so many miles and kilometres of public space and asked if advertisements were ever published for volunteers to help with rights of way.

Jacqui Wheeler thanked Councillor Rayner and stated that work was ongoing with Parishes through the Parish Paths Initiatives and the team would be looking at ways to work with other volunteer groups.

Councillor Baskerville asked if prisoners carried out any work as part of the reparation programme.

The Chair stated that she was aware that youth offenders helped with volunteering.

Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that work had been ongoing to build up a relationship with the youth offending team.

Councillor Haseler thanked Jacqui Wheeler and stated that the Cox Green were always willing to help in any way they could.

Jacqui Wheeler detailed the achievements of milestones targets in Appendix 6 to the statement. Appendix 7 contained a record of the ongoing site-specific projects and any updated this year.

Councillor Brar asked about the progress of footpaths 42 and 46.

Jacqui Wheeler stated that to the best of her knowledge, works had been completed.

The Chair asked if there were any projects that would need to go in a list of cold cases, in instances where nothing could really be done.

Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that if items were to be removed from the statement, they would still be part of the rights of way improvement plan.

ACTION: Jacqui Wheeler and the Chair to assess items that could be placed in the cold case file.

Jacqui Wheeler explained that the Planning Position Statements, as set out in Appendix 8, detailed the principles agreed to by the LAF, and had been forwarded to the planning department.

Appendix B detailed the consultation responses and any further discussions that had occurred with Parishes.

Jacqui Wheeler gave a presentation to the Panel of the work that had been carried out by both volunteers and contractors.

The Chair thanked Jacqui for the pictures and stated that it was really important to see before and after photos as they made a big difference.

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Rights of Way and Highways Licensing Panel approves the '*Milestones Statement and Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Annual Review 2023/24*'.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 7.30 pm

Chair.....

Date.....