

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD**

**LOCAL ACCESS FORUM MEETING MINUTES**

**28 November 2023**

**ATTENDANCE LIST**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interest Area</b>
Geoff Priest	Hurley Parish Council
Alan Keene	Bisham Parish Council
Steve Gillions	User – Walker
Ian lent	User – Walker
Claire Taylor	User – Biodiversity and Footpath Access
Susy Shearer	User - Cyclist
Trisha Mentzel	User – Horse Rider
Ceri Richardson	Sunninghill and Ascot Parish Council
Councillor Gurch Singh	RBWM – Councillor
Councillor Jack Douglas	RBWM – Councillor
Jacqui Wheeler	RBWM – LAF Secretary
Rosie Street	RBWM – Nature Recovery Strategy Manager
Mikey Lloyd	RBWM – Democratic Services
Laurence Ellis	RBWM – Democratic Services
Greg Nelson (Virtual)	RBWM – Trading Standards & Licencing Manager

**Observers**

Anne Keene  
Councillor Ewan Larcombe

**Apologies**

Councillor Catherine Del Campo  
Lisa Hughes  
Martin Richardson  
Mark Howard  
Ian Harvey

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD**  
**LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**  
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**MINUTES**

**1 Welcome, Apologies and Introductions**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and asked those present in the Council Chamber to introduce themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Catherine Del Campo, Lisa Hughes, Martin Richardson, Ian Harvey and Mark Howard

**B) DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interests were received.

**C) APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – 20 JUNE 2023**

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 were approved as a true record.**

**D) MATTERS ARISING FROM THE LAST MEETING**

Jacqui Wheeler, Parks and Countryside Access Officer, listed the updates on matters arising from the last meeting as set out on pages 13 – 16 of the agenda pack.

13.1 Matters arising regarding LAF Chairs Meeting: Jacqui Wheeler noted that the next LAF Chairs meeting was coming up on 6 December 2023 and would be attended by Geoff Priest, Lisa Hughes, and herself. It was noted that Kent Local Access Forum had accepted the invite to attend. Jacqui Wheeler also mentioned that the Natural England Local Access Forum Engagement Lead had asked what Local Access Forums would want to collaborate on, she explained that the Forum could discuss with other Local Access Forums in the area to put together some ideas of what to be brought forward, noting biodiversity was a key topic. It was noted that a new cut-off date for claims of historical rights of way was now 1 January 2031 but were still waiting on regulations for exceptions.

The Chair highlighted 5.1 Matters arising to Dorney Rowing Lake and the closing of a footpath. The Chair said they had spoken to the Chair of the Buckinghamshire LAF who was not aware of the closure. It was mentioned that the Buckinghamshire LAF felt they had no option to interfere as it was privately owned land. Jacqui Wheeler added that there would be seasonal access and that the Buckinghamshire LAF had agreed to take the issue to their next meeting.

**2 Membership Update**

Jacqui Wheeler gave a membership Update. She explained that Steve Gillions had resigned as a member of the LAF and that Ian lent was confirmed to be his replacement on behalf of the Ramblers. It was noted that the appointment had been ratified, making Ian lent a new member of the LAF. Additionally, three new Councillor members were welcomed, Councillors Gurch Singh, Jack Douglas and Catherine Del Campo. Jacqui Wheeler thanked Steve Gillions for his service as a LAF member and highlighted a letter of thanks that was in the report pack.

The Chair also welcomed all the new members.

**3 Temple Footbridge (Thames Path) closure – Does the LAF Support lobbying the Govt and EA?**

*This item had been moved up from Item 9 on the agenda to allow for a registered speaker.*

The Chair invited the registered speaker, Councillor Larcombe, to address the LAF on the item. Councillor Larcombe highlighted issues with Berryhill footbridge, which broke two years ago and had not yet been replaced. The cost to remove the timber footbridge was £100,000 and the replacement cost, estimated to be around £400,000, would be borne by

Buckinghamshire Council. Councillor Larcombe expressed alarm over similar issues potentially occurring with the Temple Footbridge and noted that several footbridges, originally designed and possibly built by the Environment Agency, were subsequently passed over to borough or county councils, leading to maintenance and replacement challenges. Councillor Larcombe said he would keep a close eye on this item and closely monitor the actions, or lack thereof, by the Environment Agency in addressing these issues.

The Chair reiterated the agenda item which was whether to write to the Environment Agency and the relevant government department for advice and guidance on the bridge issue and should the LAF support this communication effort or let the situation unfold? The Chair asked for comments, noting the Ramblers who used the bridge frequently.

Steve Gillions was in support of writing to the Environment Agency and said they should pose a series of questions and request regular reviews of progress against any plan they provide. Steve Gillions noted that given the Environment Agency's tendency to delay, they must ensure accountability but asking for at least six-monthly reports on progress and intentions regarding the closure.

Councillor G Singh shared concerns about the significance and inconvenience caused by the bridge closure. He queried that the initial report from 2019 suggested that the bridge could not be repaired but upon revaluation the repair now seemed feasible and asked for clarification if that was the case.

Jacqui Wheeler explained that her colleague had recently attended the Thames Path Partnership meeting, where it was reported that the Environment Agency was conducting survey work on the bridge, which was currently at the end of its life. Jacqui Wheeler said it was reported that the survey would be completed in the next few weeks and the Environment Agency expected to issue a report by early January to assess refurbishment options. It was noted that monitoring gauges were being installed to assess the structure's condition, with results expected to guide decision-making within the first few months. Jacqui Wheeler said the bridge was temporarily closed, a public right of way, and an extension to the closure was planned, pending approval. However, concerns had been raised about the safety of the temporary diversion route, prompting the Environment Agency to explore alternative options.

Alan Keene noted he had brought this up at the previous meeting on behalf of Bisham Parish Council due to Bisham being on the diversion route and raised concerns about the bridge's impact on their community. Alan Keene asked for clarification on who was responsible for the bridge repair due to conflicting information, Jacqui Wheeler confirmed that it was the Environment Agency who held sole responsibility for the bridge's repair. Alan Keene in response proposed the LAF lobbied strongly to the Environment Agency and potentially Government to address the issue, as it signified a decline in river crossing standards.

Councillor G Singh endorsed Alan Keene's proposal. He mentioned that in the report it said that funding for a new bridge would need to come from government, and currently there was no funding in place for this. It was noted if they could repair the bridge, it could buy them another five to ten years, but they would need to ensure funding would be available for a new bridge in the future and therefore lobbying now was crucial to secure future funding.

Steve Gillions suggested that they inform Theresa May about their position since she was a keen Rambler and had been a strong lobbyist in the past for similar issues. The Chair suggested they proceed cautiously as he had communicated with Theresa May on other matters and felt they needed to take the initial step of communicating their concerns to the relevant authorities first. The Chair proposed that Jacqui Wheeler and themselves to draft a letter to send to both DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Environment Agency highlighting their concerns and emphasising the LAF's statutory duty as it was a public right of way. The Chair asked if the LAF was happy for the letter to be drafted and sent right away or they would like it circulated for comment prior to be sent off.

Claire Taylor said she was happy for the letter to be sent without approval but asked Councillor Larcombe about bridges further downstream in RBWM's jurisdiction and whether they were impacted. The Chair noted that whilst the information may be relevant for understanding the broader implications of the issues, he suggested that they stick with what was on the agenda but could add a necessary paragraph to express concern it may extend up and down the river.

**AGREED: The LAF supported lobbying Government and Environment Agency.**

**ACTION: The Chair and Jacqui Wheeler to draft letter on Temple Footbridge for the LAF.**

#### **4 Update of Biodiversity Action Plan and Local Nature Recovery**

Rosie Street, Nature Recovery Strategy Manager, delivered the update and presentation.

Rosie Street explained that the Nature Recovery Strategy was a comprehensive initiative undertaken in collaboration with all six Berkshire boroughs, with RBWM leading as the responsible authority. It was a proactive response to the observed decline in biodiversity, aligning with recent government strategies aimed at creating a robust nature recovery network across both Berkshire and England as a whole. This initiative acknowledged the limitations of relying solely on nature reserves and emphasised the need for a more expansive, interconnected approach to conservation.

Rosie Street outlined key components of this strategy included the development of a statement outlining biodiversity priorities and the creation of a detailed local habitat map. These outputs would be informed by extensive engagement activities scheduled for the early part of 2024, ensuring that the strategy reflected the diverse perspectives and priorities of stakeholders across the region.

Rosie Street noted that funding for the implementation of this strategy would be sourced from various schemes including biodiversity net gain and land management agreements. The financial mechanisms, coupled with potential revenue from carbon credits, signified a multifaceted approach to securing resources for nature recovery efforts.

It was highlighted that the Nature Recovery Strategy was integrated into the planning systems of the boroughs, thereby ensuring its statutory status and relevance in decision-making processes related to land use and development. This integration underscored the strategy's significance as a guiding framework for future biodiversity conservation efforts in Berkshire.

The strategy also offered a range of opportunities for engagement and involvement from residents, local businesses, landowners, and other stakeholders. A survey was currently available on the website to gather input on preferences and participation preferences.

Rosie Street said that the Nature Recovery Strategy represented a comprehensive and collaborative effort to address biodiversity decline in Berkshire, with a focus on sustainability, engagement, and long-term impact.

Rosie Street then spoke on the biodiversity action plan (BAP) for RBWM, published in 2022, complemented the broader nature recovery strategy with a focus on RBWM-specific quantitative targets and actionable steps. It emphasised engagement efforts to involve diverse stakeholders in nature-related activities, utilising social media, websites, and in-person events. Rosie Street noted a key target was achieving 30% land dedicated to nature conservation, with current progress at 26%, aiming for restoration and land use changes to meet the goal. Various habitat action plans addressed woodland, grassland, waterways, standing water, farmland, and urban areas. Rosie Street noted the Farmland habitat action plan encouraged landowners and farmers to participate in environmental land management schemes, with partnerships like Wild Maidenhead offering conservation volunteering opportunities.

There was discussion regarding public access in the Environmental Land Management (ELMs) scheme, which Rosie Street said she would need to investigate further for specific details. Rosie Street also gave an update that the magic maps system was scheduled for some time next year, possibly in January or February but would confirm exact details.

The Chair raised a question regarding the intention to install informational boards indicating the specific habitat and its inhabitants, for individuals walking through the area. The suggestion was to provide descriptors on these boards, particularly beneficial for younger individuals to identify the flora and fauna in that specific habitat.

Rosie Street noted that while it may not directly align with the nature recovery strategy, similar initiatives had been considered within the national environment team. In recent years, there had been an increase in the installation of signage across various reserves, featuring family-friendly visuals depicting a variety of animals and the plan was to extend this signage to more local wildlife sites and nature reserves.

*7:02pm - Rosie Street left the meeting at this time.*

## **5 Taxi Consultation**

Greg Nelson, Trading Standards and Licencing Manager, presented a public consultation on potential changes to the livery of Royal Borough taxis. He explained the current requirement for taxis to be white with a purple boot, purple bonnet, and a large Royal Borough coat of arms on the side of the vehicle, dating back to 2012. Greg Nelson highlighted drivers' concerns about the costs and resale value and mentioned the administration's willingness to review this livery requirement. The consultation sought feedback on retaining the current livery, making changes, or considering alternatives for electric and hybrid vehicles.

The Chair noted that he felt the topic fell outside of the LAF's statutory remit. However, individual members had the right to respond to the consultation as they saw fit and whilst members may hold personal views on the matter, the LAF could not provide an official response as it did not align with their remit. It was noted that Greg Nelson would send a link to Democratic Services to circulate the consultation to LAF members. Greg Nelson also noted that the consultation also covered discussion on the frequency in which drivers had their DBS checked.

Councillor G Singh asked Greg Nelson if there had been any early insight into the results of the consultation so far, but Greg Nelson explained that he had not looked at the results of the consultation so far and would not do so until it closed on 22 December 2023.

## **6 Subgroups Reports**

Trisha Mentzel gave an update regarding Carpenters Wood, part of Bisham Wood and part of the Woodland Trust. Upon further examination of the map and discussions with Alan Keene and Annie Keene, it was determined that there may not be a provision for the transfer of land granting public access, specifically for horses. Access was available, but the route towards Henley Road passed through private property, posing a challenge for continuous access. Trisha Mentzel said that although the landowners were willing to allow horse riders to continue along the route, achieving a circular route was desired. Further investigation into the historical status of the old 404 Road, now a farm track, was needed to ascertain if it had been officially stopped up. Additionally, it was noted that while landowners had not been keen on horses using the track, public access for activities like dog walking was allowed.

Tisha Mentzel then highlighted Cannon Lane and a track to the A4 that belonged to the National Trust, which permitted horse riding. It was suggested to write to the National Trust to confirm their approval for continued horse riding on that piece of land, considering its usefulness in providing a safe path away from the main road and facilitating access to Maidenhead.

Jacqui Wheeler asked about the level of horse riding on the route and whether it would justify approaching the National Trust to formalise horse riding access. Trisha Mentzel said that while

the route is used, it may not see heavy usage, primarily serving local riders. There was a consensus that it could still be worthwhile to approach the National Trust to clarify access arrangements. However, Trisha Mentzel said she was uncertain about who to contact within the National Trust regarding this matter. Jacqui Wheeler said she could help provide the appropriate contact person. Support was offered to draft a letter or email to the National Trust if deemed necessary.

Trisha Mentzel spoke on the suggestion to explore the possibility of shared projects between different LAF's, which aligned with the Chairs interest in collaborative initiatives. The Chair noted the item would be included on the agenda for next week's LAF Chairs meeting, focusing on cross-border projects.

Steve Gillions wanted to make two points, firstly, although he had stepped down as Rambler's chair, he expressed his desire to continue working on the "Walks for All" project and would contact Lisa Hughes directly regarding this matter. Secondly, he addressed the ongoing issue of cycling on footpaths, particularly on the Thames Path, which had caused tensions. Steve Gillions suggested addressing this issue in a non-confrontational manner and proposed involving the multi-user group to explore potential solutions. He suggested two possible approaches: engaging local cycle clubs to remind their members about where cycling is permitted and asking the council to consider installing larger signs at popular entry points to the Thames Path. Steve Gillions believed that addressing these issues would be beneficial in resolving the problem.

Jacqui Wheeler highlighted that there had been ongoing issues with signage removal at several locations. Despite efforts to replace signage, instances of vandalism had persisted, posing a challenge in maintaining clear communication about cycling restrictions. Jacqui Wheeler noted steps had been taken, such as placing additional "no cycling" roundels in problem areas, and larger signs had been installed at critical connection points like Frog Mill.

Jacqui Wheeler acknowledged that these issues were caused by a minority of cyclists who act irresponsibly, and engaging with cyclist groups and cycle hubs to spread awareness and reinforce responsible behaviour was deemed a valuable approach.

Susy Shearer agreed that efforts to engage with cyclist groups and cycle hubs to spread awareness and reinforce responsible behaviour would be beneficial. She expressed willingness to pass on the message through both hubs and to the manager of a major interchange frequented by cyclists on Sunday mornings. It was noted this proactive approach demonstrated a commitment to addressing the issue and promoting responsible cycling behaviour within the community.

The Chair thanked Steve Gillions for offering continued support to Lisa Hughes' project despite no longer being a LAF member. The Chair proposed that Steve Gillions coordinate with Lisa Hughes on how multi-user groups could address the issue, possibly through another workshop. The aggressive behaviour of some cyclists was identified as a main problem, and collaborative efforts were deemed essential in finding solutions.

Susy Shearer provided a cycling update. Firstly, regarding the neighbourhood plan in Windsor proposing an off-road cycle path along Fifield Road on Crown Estate land, initial discussions with Crown Estate were not fruitful. Susy Shearer noted that Martin Richardson suggested exploring the idea further with maps and negotiations. Susy Shearer proposed to bring this issue back to the subgroup for further discussion, potentially involving Ascot and Sunninghill parish councils and Bracknell Forest to address it comprehensively.

Secondly, Susy Shearer spoke on the development that was about to commence on site AL21 adjacent to the Willows Path for 135 units. She noted it was crucial to ensure that cycling and walking infrastructure within this development aligned with existing and potential new cycling infrastructure outside. Susy Shearer said this approach was in line with Active Travel England's standing advice note from June 2023 on integrating cycling and walking infrastructure into new developments and broader infrastructure planning.

Regarding the developments, The Chair said it was important to note that the original local plan was extensively reviewed by the LAF, with recommendations made for linking up paths or installing new ones for walkers and cyclists. The Chair said these recommendations were supposed to be provided to developers during pre-development talks. However, it was unclear if this has been upheld since the change of administration.

Jacqui Wheeler said it would be valuable to schedule another subgroup meeting to follow up on issues highlighted in the September meeting. She suggested aiming for a meeting in January and would propose dates accordingly. Jacqui Wheeler spoke on Martin Richardson's inquiry about the trial removal of barriers along the Jubilee River and said she had reached out to a contact at Slough Council, responsible for most barriers along the river, and planned to discuss the trial before Christmas and provide Martin Richardson with an update afterward and circulate any updates and proposed meeting dates to the group.

## **7 Training**

Whilst there was no specific training update, Tisha Mentzel commented on training opportunities like one Lisa Hughes attended and suggested it might be beneficial to keep the group informed about upcoming dates in case other LAF members were interested. The Chair elaborated that the British Horse Society offered training courses online, focusing on promoting sensible use of paths for cyclists, walkers, horse riders, and dog walkers. Trisha Mentzel and Lisa Hughes participated in this training and found it useful. The Chair noted there were considerations regarding costs and funding for these courses and that previously, there was a more detailed two-day training session for LAF members, but attendance was challenging due to the time commitment and cost.

Jacqui Wheeler requested to circle back to Agenda Item 5 to ask if anyone had any comments about the draft forward work plan on page 61 of the reports pack, which outlined the LAF's priorities and areas of interest. She noted it was essential to ensure everyone was happy with it or if there are any suggestions for improvement. The plan would guide their work over the next couple of years. Jacqui Wheeler wanted to draw attention to the consolidation of the Definitive Mapping Statement (DMS) and the upcoming review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which would require the LAF's involvement. The current plan was until 2026, so they needed to start planning for its review and potential engagement work to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

The Chair highlighted the detailed tasks in the draft forward work plan, such as engagement and plan effectiveness, would require commitment and time, possibly involving workshops to develop feasible proposals for the Council. The Chair noted they would need assistance from fellow LAF members as it would not be feasible for Jacqui Wheeler to handle everything alone.

## **8 LCWIIP Updates from RBWM Transport Team**

Jacqui Wheeler gave The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan updates from the RBWM Transport Team, detailed on pages 63 to 65 of the report, highlighting ongoing studies and improvements in various areas of the Borough. She said members were encouraged to review a recent drawing of proposals for improvements on King Street, Maidenhead Town Center, shared by Dug Tremellen, Transport Policy Manager. Feedback was requested by December 17th, and members could email their comments to Dug Tremellen and copy in Jacqui Wheeler for coordination. It was noted the request followed a recent walkabout in Autumn 2022.

Councillor Douglas questioned the forum's preference for mixed-use versus single-use infrastructure, particularly regarding a proposal for a cycle track down the middle of a designated area with pedestrian zones on either side.

The Chair noted that upon reviewing the email and drawings, it was agreed that separate paths for pedestrians and cyclists were preferred for safety reasons, particularly on long, straight stretches where cyclists may travel at higher speeds.

Councillor Douglas asked if there had been discussion on cyclist calming measures such as wiggling the track? The Chair noted that previous points regarding the need to break up the straight line of the path to slow cyclists down had already been raised, suggesting the possibility of introducing obstacles along the path to achieve this, despite the inherent straightness of the road structure. Councillor Douglas confirmed if that was something that the LAF wanted? The Chair acknowledged that whilst individual circumstances are addressed as they arise, there had not been a formal establishment of principles regarding path design. Jacqui Wheeler also requested that Councillor Douglas provide his feedback on the drawings to Dug Tremellen and herself via email.

Councillor G Singh queried about the consultation mentioning benches and planters being dotted around and asked if there would be a drawing produced later for that, or would it be decided in the future? The Chair noted that he believed additions to the drawings would be made when they had been budgeted for.

Councillor G Singh was pleased that the decision had been made to divert funding from the contraflow, as he felt it was not deemed sensible and had received objections from residents and businesses.

Susy Shearer wanted to highlight Active Travel England's recent publications regarding consultations on larger developments. Susy Shearer said they had released two documents: a standing advice note applicable to developments with as few as 10 dwellings, and a planning application assessment toolkit designed for planning and highways officers, and said it was important for all local authorities to be aware of and utilise these resources as benchmarks for evaluating proposals. The Chair commented on the documents being national documents and regarding the earlier discussion about the local plan and existing paths within a development, it was important to clarify that it was not mandatory for the Borough to adhere to the LAF's suggestions, but it was a statutory requirement for them to consider the LAF's input.

## **9 Milestones Statement Updates**

Jacqui Wheeler directed members to page 71 of the reports pack for the milestone targets for 2023/24, providing an up-to-date status. She said they were awaiting the Autumn survey results and extend a thanks to the Ramblers for conducting volunteer surveys on the condition of the public rights of way network. It was noted that the text in red indicated works that were yet to be completed but had funding allocated. Jacqui Wheeler said if there were any questions or comments regarding the report, they would be conducting the usual milestone review consultation in January with the Parish Councils and the LAF.

Steve Gillions noted on AC2, physical access improvement, he believed it was worth noting that they had replaced all the stiles in the Borough that they were able to, except for those where landlords had refused permission for replacement and unfortunately, were unable to proceed further on this target until there was a change in the landowners' decisions.

Jacqui Wheeler responded that it was important to consider alternative approaches to defining physical access improvements. She explained this could involve actions such as removing gates, repairing surfaces, or installing handrails. It was noted that whilst these may not be large-scale projects, they contribute to enhancing accessibility within the current resource constraints.

## **10 Joint LAF Chairs**

As the Joint LAF Chairs meeting had already been discussed within an earlier item, Jacqui Wheeler wished to highlight a point from the previous Joint LAF Chairs meeting. It was discussed that the Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum's had requested feedback on



a proposed Thames Valley Circular Walk that passed through Windsor and Maidenhead. Members were invited to review the route on page 83 of the electronic reports pack and provide input on its quality and potential for promotion. Jacqui Wheeler noted the circular route, accessible via public transport, could encourage walking enthusiasts and would email members for comments and conduct additional investigations.

Councillor G Singh asked Jacqui Wheeler if the route was already being promoted and advertised? Jacqui Wheeler said the route has been promoted on the Visorando walks around Reading website and had garnered attention from other LAF's. She explained they sought feedback on the route's quality and potential, considering its extensive coverage and scenic attractions.

**11 Horizon Scanning – SAPC Report – Status & Recommendations and Sustainability SPD engagement.**

Jacqui Wheeler introduced the Horizon Scanning item and wanted to draw everyone's attention to the report from Sunninghill and Ascot Parish Council. Jacqui Wheeler explained she recently had a meeting with them, along with Sharon Wootten, Public Rights of Way Officer, to discuss improvements in their network within the Borough.

Ceri Richardson elaborated that they had formed a cycling and walking working party in collaboration with Sunningdale Parish Council, aiming to connect the two Parishes from southwest to southeast. She said they had identified several potential public rights of way routes and had been working with Jacqui Wheeler and Sharon Wootten to map out a route from Sunningdale station, Uprise Road and into Ascot, utilising existing public rights of way. Ceri Richardson said there was a gap alongside some privately owned land and Network Rail's property that they were engaging stakeholders to address. Given the upcoming developments in Sunningdale, Sunninghill, and Ascot, ensuring safe spaces for walking was crucial, especially for activities like active travel, leisure, and school commuting.

Jacqui Wheeler said during discussions with the Parish Council, there was a consensus on seeking support for approaching landowners, particularly Network Rail, regarding footpath 13 alongside the railway line. Jacqui Wheeler said she contacted RBWM transport team, who expressed support in principle for the improvements, indicating potential receptiveness from Network Rail. Jacqui Wheeler explained they sought the LAF's support for the route and approach to Network Rail. The Chair confirmed the LAF's support for this.

The meeting, which began at 6.32 pm, finished at 8.03 pm

Chair.....

Date.....