

RURAL FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2016

PRESENT: Councillors Christine Bateson (Chairman), David Evans (Vice-Chairman), David Coppinger, David Hilton, Richard Kellaway and Colin Rayner

Also in attendance: Councillor Samantha Rayner

Officers: Chris Berry, Tony Carr, Andrew Fletcher, Harjit Hunjan, Jenifer Jackson and Shilpa Manek

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. All attendees introduced themselves.

The Chairman advised Members of a change of order of the Agenda items, Inspector Emily Roberts was not attending the meeting so the Rural Crime item would be withdrawn from the Agenda and an addition of an urgent item, Procedures of dealing with Ploughing and Cropping Issues would be added in place.

In accordance with section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman of the Rural Forum has agreed to consider an urgent Part I item in relation to the procedure for dealing with ploughing and cropping issues, at the meeting of the Forum on 30 November 2016, due to the need to receive the comments and feedback from the Rural Forum Members before the report is considered at the March 2017 Rights of Way and Highway Licensing Panel.

The Chairman suggested that the rural walk take place in summer 2017 at the Rinder Farm.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Jane Jennings, NFU, Tim Parry, Community Council for Berkshire, Richard Simmonds and David Scott, Head of Governance, Partnerships, Performance & Policy (Monitoring Officer).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Colin and Samantha Rayner declared an interest in items 5 (Procedures for dealing with ploughing and cropping issues) and 8 (Borough Local Plan). They remained in the room during the debate.

Councillors Colin and Samantha Rayner declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in item 9 (Traffic Impact in relation to smart motorway's) and left the room during the debate.

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were **Unanimously Agreed**.

RURAL CRIME

This item was withdrawn as inspector Emily Roberts could not attend Forum.

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH PLOUGHING AND CROPPING ISSUES

Andrew Fletcher, Public Rights of Way Officer, distributed some handouts and then explained to the Panel the current procedure for ploughing and cropping issues.

The Public Rights of Way team look after the paths, ensure they are opened in the right time and at the end of the process, if there had been a breach, report this to the Rural Payments Agency. This has a very big impact on the farmers as everything is inspected, it is not limited just to the path.

The Local Access Forum discussed this issue at their meeting in early November and had produced a new procedure in section 2.8. There were a few changes;

1. Make first contact with farmers via telephone to explain the report or issue. This telephone call should agree the date with the farmer for the resolution of the issue based upon the 14 day deadline. Explain that if the works are not done by this deadline the issue will be reported to the RPA.
2. Take the 14 day deadline from the date that the farmer is contacted. Where necessary agree extension of this deadline up to 28 days, for example where ground conditions do not allow proper reinstatement.
3. Request farmer to contact RBWM when the works have been done, providing photographic evidence.
4. If the agreed deadline has not been met this should then be reported to the RPA.

The Rural Forum's opinion was sought on the proposed changes. The proposal would then be considered by the Rights of Way and Highways Licensing Panel in March 2017.

Points discussed by the Forum included:

- Those who regularly walk on the paths knew the paths very well and where they were.
- Other boroughs did not have such rigid conditions.
- Farmers were not easily contactable, William Emmett offered to send the Public Rights of Way team, a database with all farmer details including email addresses. This should ease the process and resolve issues quickly.
- The Forum discussed what was meant by resolution. This could be a path marked out and rolled out if it had been ploughed and/or cut if blocked by crops.
- William Emmett suggested that he give a presentation to the Rural Forum at a future meeting.

Councillor Colin Rayner asked how many miles of footpath there were in the borough, how many complaints were received and who were the complaints generally from. Andrew Fletcher informed the Forum that in total there were approximately 191 miles of public rights of way and there were about 15-20 complaints per year on arable issues. The complaints came from many sources such as walkers, right of way officers and also from certain groups.

Councillor Hilton asked about the consequences for the farming community if they were to foul the legislation. Andrew Fletcher explained that a notice would be served, the crop would be cut at a cost plus an additional 10 % admin fee would be added. Then it would be reported to the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), where they may choose to inspect everything on the Farm.

Mr Copas highlighted that the way forward was good communication between the farmers and the officers and to solve any issues before moving up the scale, resolving issues quickly.

The Chairman suggested that farmers attended the next Rights of Way and Highway Licensing Panel on 7 March 2017.

ACTION: William Emmett to send farmers database to Andrew Fletcher.

ACTION: William Emmett to give presentation at next Forum meeting.

ACTION: Andrew Fletcher to inform farmers of the next Rights of Way and Highway Licensing Panel.

WEIGHT LIMITS FOR HGV'S ON LOCAL ROADS

Tony Carr, Traffic and Road Safety Manager, updated Panel:

- Police traffic enforcement was focussed on casualty reduction initiatives. Enforcement of HGV restrictions was a relatively low priority.
- The Police would support schemes that include physical measures to restrict HGVs as this would remove the need for enforcement. However this would affect agricultural vehicles as well as HGVs.
- Trading Standards had carried out Lorry Watch initiatives on the A330 Ascot Road Holyport and B383 Chobham Road Sunningdale.
- There was a permanent traffic counter on the A330 Ascot Holyport. Comparing data from Sept 2015 with Sept 2016, there had been a 40% reduction in the number of HGVs following the introduction of the HGV restriction.
- William Emmett was appalled that there was no enforcement as HGVs go past a primary school.
- Concerns were raised about a dangerous junction on the Drift Road, where it was reported that there had been many accidents.
- It was suggested that changes to the A330 Ascot Road were made as part of the M4 Smart Motorway scheme.

UPDATE FROM THE FARMING COMMUNITY

Andrew Randall went through the presentation, attached. The following points were discussed:

- The effects of weather, a 40% reduction in crops.
- The increase in bugs.
- Wheat had a good quantity with a good crop.
- Oil Seed Rape – this is very difficult to produce, this was seeing increased problems.
- Change in currency has been helpful, 16% more than last year.
- Beef sector – had a good season.
- Sheep sector – demand for lamb gone down.

Andrew Randall discussed the effects of Brexit, highlighting the ability to diversify, having more flexibility to bring in non farming income from sites such as glamping.

BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

Jenifer Jackson, Head of Planning and Chris Berry, Interim Policy Planning Manager, both attended the Forum to update Members on the Borough Local Plan.

Jenifer Jackson gave a presentation on the background on the Borough Local Plan. The presentation would be circulated with the minutes. Jenifer Jackson went through the timetable, highlighting that the consultation on section 18 would commence on 2 December 2016 and would close at 5pm on 13 January 2017.

The Chairman requested that Jenifer Jackson clarify the meaning of affordable housing. Jenifer Jackson explained the following:

- Shared ownership – pay rent to housing association and pay mortgage
- Social rent – 60% of market rent
- Intermediate rent – 80% of market rent

- Key worker housing scheme – teachers/social workers etc (80% + shared ownership)

Barbara Story asked how many units 30% would be and was advised by Jenifer Jackson that in every development over 15 units, 30% would be affordable housing. This would equate to approximately 4000 units over 20 years.

Alan Keene asked about the call for sites and was advised that HELAA had replaced SCHLOR. There would be a further call for sites.

The following points were also raised by Forum Members:

- Some areas in the green belt that were out seem to be back in now. Was the green belt usage being softened? The green belt usage was of national policy and to release land in the green belt, there would have to be exceptional circumstances.
- Neighbourhood Plans being part of the development plan.
- Did the term “key workers” include farmers? The farmers were not considered as “key workers”.

TRAFFIC IMPACT IN RELATION TO SMART MOTORWAY'S

Tony Carr, Traffic and Road Safety Manager, informed the Forum of the following points:

- The M4 Smart motorway would run between junctions 3 and 12.
- The road would be widened to provide four lanes in each direction with no hard shoulder, but emergency refuge laybys would be provided for vehicle breakdowns etc. The road would be under constant CCTV surveillance.
- The scheme would involve all bridges across the M4 within the Borough being widened. The new bridges would be constructed alongside the existing ones before the old bridges were demolished.
- The approval was given by the Secretary of State.
- At present the design of the scheme was being finalised.
- There were currently no firm dates for the work to commence. It was likely that work would start at either end of the scheme and work towards Maidenhead.

BERKSHIRE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE - UPDATE

Amanda Gee and Liz Hadden, BCA, gave an update on how the college is progressing.

Amanda Gee reported that the BCA currently had land up for planning for a care home. It was a Grade I listed building that required a £1.5 million renovation. The college were currently carrying out an energy review on the campus. The poly tunnels go up in the next week.

Currently carrying out a project with Chelsea. The heats for the Chelsea Flower Show were going to take place at the college on 15 January 2017. The Chelsea Fringe would also be hosted at the college on the 21 May 2017.

The college had just got permission to make changes to the public footpath, Now it would go to the Diana the Huntress statue. It was a huge renovation.

Liz Hadden informed the Forum Members that fifteen students had graduated, four had gone to university, six had gone to work in beef and dairy farms, two had started in their own farms, one had joined the team at BCA and the rest had gone on to become vets.

The college would soon be offering level 2 in the courses they offered and apprentices.

The college supports young people, the Windsor and Maidenhead Young Farmers Club is also hosted at the college.

The next AGM is on 20 December 2016 at 7.30pm at the college.

Councillor Rayner mentioned the trustees meetings, there had been three to date. There was a programme of events.

The BCA thanked all Forum Members that assisted them to host events, the last one being Track week, where Rural Forum Members had provided drivers and tractors.

MAINTENANCE OF MAIN CARRIAGEWAYS - WRITTEN UPDATE

A following written report was provided to Members from Tony Robinson, Senior Streetcare Officer:

Overhanging vegetation

Streetcare officers have been advised that vegetation needs to be better maintained generally in rural areas and a flailing programme is in place to look at borough maintained hedges.

As with all vegetation including urban locations the responsibility rests with the land owner. The authority has programmes to deal with vegetation, which it is responsible for. This includes scheduled works and Ad Hoc as required. It should be noted that areas which have a riparian ditch, the responsibility will rest with the land owner. There can also be a small number of land owners which may have responsibilities for large areas; Crown Estates and National trust to name but two.

Throughout the year roads are inspected and observing both trees and other vegetation forms part of this inspection. The authority will deal with borough owned vegetation that encroaches onto the highway and write letters to the land owner where private encroachments occur. They will receive an instruction to cut back to the boundary and or to increase the height of the lowest branches of trees.

It should be noted that a great number of land owners take pride in the appearance of their boundaries and these tend to be maintenance free in terms of enforced work and correspondence.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted that the next meeting was on Thursday 9 March 2017 in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Maidenhead.

The meeting, which began at 5.45 pm, finished at 7.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....