

Activities of the forum

Milestones Statement, and targets for the coming year

The forum was consulted on the Milestones Statement and Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Annual Report 2020-21 and recommended that the targets and priorities are retained for the coming year. The forum also recommended incorporating accessibility objectives highlighted by the Accessibility Working Group in their report “Improving the accessibility of walks and green spaces for People with Disabilities”. These recommendations were approved under delegated powers and reviewed by the Chair of the Rights of Way and Highways Licensing Panel in March 2020 due to Covid restrictions and formed the basis of the targets for the coming year.

Disabled Access and Public Rights of Way

The Accessibility Working subgroup (AWG) has continued its work meeting several times since its conception providing valuable feedback on a pilot accessibility audit at a new RBWM public open space which has led to benches being installed and ongoing work to ensure safe accessibility to and within the site. The AWG has also written a report that feeds into the Milestones Statement and Rights of Way Improvement Plan Annual Report highlighting the need to focus on practical improvements and better information to make public spaces more accessible for people with disabilities. The approach and top-level recommendations were presented by the working group to the Local Access Forum on 26th November 2019 when the recommendations were unanimously approved by the LAF.

Battlemead Common – Public Open Space and Wildlife Conservation

The Forum received information about the Borough’s purchase of additional land known as Battlemead Common. A magnificent site with a mixture of important wildlife habitats along with public access set in previous agricultural land with views across the Thames towards Cliveden. As a member of the Friends of Battlemead Common Group the forum was well placed to advocate for access and accessibility to help the Friends work towards a balance between the needs of public access and those of wildlife conservation. Over the last year the Forum has received continuous reports on this subject, supporting the work of the Friends Group with members providing recommendations concerning accessibility on the site.

Visits to Sites of Interest

A late summer visit to Battlemead Common in September 2019 enabled members to gain

first hand insights into the issues involved in management of the various habitat areas eg; the annual hay cut and the needs of public access.



Despite the Covid crisis throughout 2020 Forum members met in July 2020 in a socially distanced way to receive a guided tour of the Thriftwood, extension of Ockwell's Park given by RBWM's Countryside Manager explaining about the development of the site of special scientific interest and considering the potential for improved public access for horse riding and cycling.

Multi-user routes and Horse Riding improvements

In November 2019, the Forum agreed to establish another valuable sub group to look into provision for horse riding and multi-use routes in the borough. The groups proclaimed their aim was to improve safety and minimise risk for equestrians, as legitimate, vulnerable road users. They aim to achieve this by expanding the off-road multi-use network, providing safe alternative linkages between PROWs and education of road and PROW users. In March 2020 the group were able to publish their first report describing the results of their survey of local horse owners designed to gain insights into the current riding experiences within the Borough. This report was presented to the LAF in June 2020 at its first virtual meeting (due to Covid) and accepted as an important step towards building a comprehensive strategy in the borough towards multi-use routes for all vulnerable road users.

Volunteer Works

The forum continued to monitor the volunteer works that are carried out on the public rights of way network which contribute vitally to the costs involved in keeping the network available on the ground. The Borough's Rights of Way team have developed valuable relationships with local youth and educational organisations and other experienced volunteering groups to provide excellent hands on experience in management of PROW and the opportunity to help improve the network.

Recruitment and Promotion

The forum made several recommendations to improve the promotion of the forum on the Council's website and are continually looking at ways the membership can be increased by making use of borough wide publications. The Forum are keen to encourage younger members to be involved and to this end have been in contact with the local college of agriculture on an ad hoc basis so as to lead to a better understanding of issues concerning access to greenspace.

Links with other local, regional and national groups

Maintaining links with other neighbouring Local Access Forums has been increasingly challenging over the past year with the Covid pandemic, authority resources reducing and officer time under pressure. However there is still enthusiasm in the region amongst officers and Forums to restart these meetings to allow information sharing, bench marking and inter communications to agree best practice.

COVID – the pandemic covering the second half of this year has clearly shown the value that the public rights of way network provides for everyone and is a testament to the importance of continuing work being done by all Forums nationwide.

Other issues that the forum has discussed during 2019-2020:

- Volunteer works
- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
- Building relationship with the Cycling Action Group

Looking forward

Accessibility Working Group – recommendations to be taken forward
 Pending borough Local Plan review
 Horse riding and multi –user provision working group in conjunction with Cycling Group
 Promotion to and encouragement of younger membership/involvement.

Meetings of the Forum

The Local Access Forum meetings for 2019-2020 were as follows:

Formal meetings

- 4th July 2019
- 26th November 2019
- 30th June 2020

Membership of the Forum

The forum is expected to achieve a reasonable balance of members’ interests. The current membership of the Local Access Forum is listed below.

Name	Representing	Other interests
James Copas	Land and estate management	
Steve Gillions	Walking	East Berks Ramblers
Lisa Hughes	Disability access	
Cllr. Maureen Hunt	RBWM Councillor	Chair of Rights of Way and Highways Licensing Panel
Tom Jarvis	Land and estate management	Crown Estate
Alan Keene	Land and estate management	Bisham Parish Council, countryside, rights of way, farming and land management,
Geoff Priest	Open countryside, access for younger users	Hurley Parish Council
Trisha Mentzel	Horse riding	Wildlife
Anne Woodward	Horse riding	Road safety for vulnerable users
Lynn Penfold	Wildlife Conservation	Access to the Countryside
Cllr Julian Sharpe	RBWM Councillor	
Cllr. Haseler	RBWM Councillor	
Susy Shearer	Cycling	

Finances

			Total Cost (£)
Meeting expenses			
	Meeting refreshments	200	
			200
Members' Expenses:			
	Dependent Care	-	-
	Travel / Mileage	-	-
	Other Expenses	-	-
Grand Total			200

Note: The costs above do not include overheads such as Officer time or printing costs

How to get involved

For more information about the Local Access Forum and how you can get involved, visit the Local Access Forum web pages at https://www3.rbwm.gov.uk/info/200938/local_access_forums , or contact Jacqui Wheeler, Parks & Countryside Access Officer on (01628) 796289 or email jacqui.wheeler@rbwm.gov.uk or prow@rbwm.gov.uk