

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 2021-22 and recommended that the targets and priorities are retained for the coming year. However, the Forum requested that there is more two-way communication throughout the year on progress towards these targets and the opportunity for members to feed into these with further suggestions.

Working Groups Together

The RBWM Local Access Forum successfully set up a working group at the end of 2019 to look at improving equestrian access through raising awareness of the issues and via identifying opportunities for new multi-user provision. This group and the existing Accessibility Working group along with new members representing cycling via the Windsor and Maidenhead Cycling Action Group have begun working together to find ways to influence the Council's Transport team's production of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to benefit **all** vulnerable road user groups.

The Multi-User Working Group have produced several reports based on data gathering amongst local livery stables highlighting problems faced by horse riders as vulnerable road users and have been working at identifying deliverable improvements as well as aspirational ones.

Links have been made and new members recruited to the Forum from the local Cycling Group during 2021. The Accessibility Working Group has continued to run access audits on its prioritized Access for All walks with the aim to tackle problems encountered and drive for sustained efforts across the board to improve standards.

Partnership working for Battlemead Common – Public Open Space and Wildlife Conservation

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 and a half the Forum has received continuous reports on this subject, helping the Friends Group move forward towards a compromise with a final decision now being reached on managing the site for all.

Multi-user routes and Horse-Riding improvements

Set up in November 2019 this subgroup has gathered momentum throughout 2020 -21 building on its first report with multiple investigations into new provision and suggestions for improvements to the network that could be a help to all vulnerable road users. One such project being taken forward is for a permissive bridleway at a council owned countryside park at Cox Green, Maidenhead. It is hoped this will act as good practice to encourage other local landowners to allow equestrian access onto their land.

Volunteer Works

After a period of inactivity during the pandemic and required social distancing, volunteer works have begun again in earnest during the early part of 2021. A report taken to the Forum on 5th July 2021 detailed completed and planned tasks for 2021 including major vegetation clearance, reed pulling, step construction and waymarking to name but a few. These tasks are increasingly valuable to provide help in sustaining and improving our local rights of way network as well as local parks which performed such a vital function during the pandemic helping people's health and wellbeing. The Forum continues to receive reports and support all volunteer activities.

Recruitment and Promotion

Unfortunately, three members resigned during the last year and a half, two as a direct consequence of the pandemic, however two new members have also joined, one representing cycling and the other as a liaison with one parish council. The Forum recognises that there is a need to maintain the balance of interests and is keen to recruit cycling members and those representing land management/ownership. The Forum remains committed to encouraging younger members to be involved and though delayed due to Covid, is in contact with the local college of agriculture to bring this about.

Links with other local, regional and national groups

Though enthusiasm is still present to restart the joint chairs meetings in the region and to expand it to include other areas LAF's such as Surrey, a date to meet has not yet been agreed. The Forum feels this is an important objective for the coming year to foster information sharing, solidarity, bench marking and partnership working on cross boundary and shared issues. The pandemic, reductions in authority resources and officer time under pressure remain challenges.

Other issues that the forum has discussed during 2020-2021:

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

Looking forward

Re-starting the joint chairs meeting to develop dialogue between LAF's in the region
Accessibility Working Group – recommendations to be taken forward

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 2020 - 2021 were as follows:

Formal meetings: 30th June 2020
 30th November 2020
 5th July 2021 (NB: this meeting falls outside the scope of this report)

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
Geoff Priest (Chair)	Open countryside, access for younger users	Hurley Parish Council
Lisa Hughes (vice chair)	Disability access	Disability & Inclusion Forum
Cllr. Maureen Hunt	RBWM Councillor	Chair of Rights of Way and Highways Licensing Panel
Cllr. Phil Haseler	RBWM Councillor	n/a
Cllr Julian Sharpe	RBWM Councillor	n/a
James Copas	Land and estate management	n/a
Steve Gillions	Walking	East Berks Ramblers
Mark Howard	Walking	Cookham Parish
Alan Keene	Land and estate management	Bisham Parish Council, countryside, rights of way, farming and land management,
Trisha Mentzel	Horse riding	Wildlife
Lynn Penfold	Wildlife Conservation	Access to the Countryside
Susy Shearer	Cycling and walking	Green Infrastructure and Open Spaces
Anne Woodward	Horse riding	Road safety for vulnerable users

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 [Local access forums | Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead \(rbwm.gov.uk\)](https://www.rbwm.gov.uk/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

Local Access Forum Annual Review Form

April 2020 to March 2021

Name of LAF	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Name of LAF Chair	Geoff Priest (from 11.06.2018)
Name of LAF Secretary	Jacqui Wheeler (from 18.02.19)

Total number of LAF members	13
Number of members representing users of public rights of way or access land	6
Number of members representing owners and occupiers of access land or land over which PROW subsist	3
Number of members representing other interests	4

1. LAF achievements? (Please give examples to illustrate how your LAF has improved public access to land for the purpose of open air recreation and the enjoyment of the area)

The RBWM Local Access Forum successfully set up a working group to look at improving equestrian access through raising awareness of the issues and via identifying opportunities for new multi-user provision. This group and the Accessibility Working group along with new members representing cycling via the Windsor and Maidenhead Cycling Action Group have begun working together to find ways to influence the Council's Transport team's production of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to benefit all vulnerable road user groups. The Multi-User Working Group have produced several reports based on data gathering amongst local livery stables highlighting problems faced by horse riders as vulnerable road users and have been working at identifying deliverable improvements as well as aspirational ones.

Links have been made and new members recruited to the Forum from the local Cycling Group. The Accessibility Working Group has continued to run access audits on its prioritized Access for All walks with the aim to tackle problems encountered and drive for sustained efforts across the board to improve standards.

The LAF became engaged in a steering group for a major new public open space, known as Battlemead Common which has highlighted the discourse between public access and wildlife conservation and forced compromise on both sides to enable a balance to be achieved.

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2. What are the main challenges affecting your LAF's ability to deliver improvements to public access in the coming year?

Same as last year - Reduced resources in terms of officer time/ workload/ budget/ Council support.

Same as last year - No clear guidance or support from Defra or Natural England.

Pushing the access agenda within the need for sustainability.

3. What are your top three priorities for the year ahead?

Creating online Walks For All leaflets

Better provision for horse riders in conjunction with multi-user provision

Building communication links with parishes and communications within different team of the appointing authority

4. Is there any particular support or training that you need to deliver your priorities?

We would seek improved lines of communication from Natural England, Defra and the DfT for national and regional consultations.

LAF activity in 2020/21

Number of full LAF meetings held	2	Number of sub-group meetings held	2
Number of working groups led by others	0	Number of training days provided by the Appointing Authority	0

Partners the LAF worked with during 2020/21 (click on a box or type 'x')

Local Nature Partnerships	-	Local Enterprise Partnerships	-
Health and Wellbeing Boards	-	LEADER funding Local Action Groups	-

Please add numbers to the following differentiating between formal consultations and general advice given by the LAF on particular subjects. If a consultation covered more than one subject area, please count separately.

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	Consultations	Advice
Green Infrastructure strategies	-	-
Public Space Protection Orders (including gating orders)	-	-
Transport (LTP, traffic management, rail, DfT, Highways Agency)	-	1
Water / Coast (slipways, flood defence, EA, shoreline)	-	-
Public open space (protection orders, commons, village greens)	-	-
Dog exclusion/on leads/fouling orders	-	1
Planning applications	-	1
Housing development schemes	-	-
Local development frameworks and planning strategies	-	1
PROW creation, diversion or closure - number of each	2	1
Right of Way Improvement Plan review	-	-
Route improvements (to PROW and other multi-user/cycling/horse-riding/walking routes)	-	5
Promotion of access, open air recreation and the enjoyment of the area	1	1
Definitive map and recording PROW	-	-
Parish Council or other grant schemes	-	-
Disabled access / access for people with mobility issues?	-	1
Vehicular access and issues relating to motorised use of PROW	-	-
Nature conservation (including SSSIs)	-	-
Land use and planning matters (e.g. informal advice on land development)	1	1
Greenspace including Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves	1	1
Open Access land restrictions	-	-
Coastal Access/National Trails	-	-
NNR dedication	-	-

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Agri-environment scheme issues (HLS and new Countryside Stewardship) e.g. expiring permissive access agreements, effects of land management options on public access etc.	-	1
Forestry and woodland	-	1

Any other LAF activity (please specify)

5. Summarise any feedback received from section 94(4) bodies¹

The Forestry Commission advised they would be unable to upgrade paths within Ashley Hill Forest to formalize equestrian access despite best efforts of the LAF and letter from the local MP.

6. Please provide any comments from your Appointing Authority

The LAF has managed to maintain a high level of input towards its aims and has responded to consultations via the Fast Response Team despite the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic, only one meeting was rescheduled and members have embraced the virtual meetings format.

7. Comments from LAF Chair

The support and guidance of the RBWM Parks and Countryside Access officer and colleagues to myself and the LAF has been excellent during the trying times of the pandemic, this with limited resources. The members of the three working groups continued to give freely of their time and produced excellent reports identifying suggested areas of improvement for the Boroughs consideration. All the LAF members embraced the virtual meeting format with some lively input by members and external presentations by council officers and their consultant's. I fully support the need for better communication with DEFRA, Natural England and DfT.

¹ The Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000, Section 94(4) specifies that it is the function of a local access forum, as respects to the area for which it is established, to advise the appointing authority; the local highway authority; other bodies exercising functions under CROW Act Part 1 (Natural England, Forestry Commission and English Heritage) and such other bodies as may be prescribed. These other bodies are set out in the LAF Regulations 2007, paragraph 21, and include: any conservation board established by the Secretary of State, any parish or town council in the area covered by the LAF, and Sport England.

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8. Any important information to bring to the attention of Natural England

These are already stated in the preceding items.

9. Any other comments

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