

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting of the Forum
Wednesday 20th May 2024

Present: Jan Heard (Vice Chair), Helena Barker, Mark Bullen, Sharon Bovingdon. Tony Vickers, Nicola Greenwood, Janice Bridger, Angus Ross, Mark Bullen, Pip Davidson (TRF) Cllr Nigel Foot, Portfolio holder for Countryside (WBDC).

In Attendance: Sandra Griffin (Secretary), Elaine Cox (WBDC), Natalie Lucas (RBC).

Apologies for absence: Simon Pike (arrived very late), Margaret Pawson, Connor Clark (WBC) Graham Smith, Donald Peck, Tim Lewis

Local authority notation: WBC - Wokingham Borough Council.
WBDC - West Berkshire District Council.
RBC - Reading Borough Council.

Jan Heard welcomed everyone to the meeting and suggested everyone introduce themselves, she then made a special welcome to both Pip Davidson (TRF) and Cllr Nigel Foot, portfolio holder for Countryside WBDC.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

No questions.

2: DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS WITH RESPECT TO AGENDA ITEMS.

None

3: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM JAN 2024 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

SEPTEMBER MEETING ACTION 5 MOWN VERGES

Jan Heard drafted a document regarding the mowing of verges in Wokingham and is still awaiting a response. Connor Clark to follow up. **THIS IS STILL ONGOING.**

4. WEST BERKSHIRE ROWIP.

The draft ROWIP has progressed through the WBDC Corporate Board (senior officers) and Operations Board (members). The view of the Operations Board was that a short attractive leaflet was needed to summarise the actions to take place, so that the ROWIP can be easily publicised more widely. This is now in preparation and a draft has been circulated to the Forum prior to today's meeting. Nicola commented that the leaflet does not mention walkers, cyclists or equestrians.

The Delivery Plan creates targets against the actions over years one to three and Elaine asked for any comments by email as to how best to implement the targets.

WBDC officers met with the Disabled Access Working Group, notes of the meeting were circulated prior to today.

Janice stated that whilst the ROWIP is an impressive piece of work she felt it was aspirational, raises expectations, but is it achievable with local authorities being so underfunded?

Some discussion followed regarding the role Parish Councils could play in supporting the ROWIP, they have CIL funding that may not be being used at this time.

ACTION: Forum members to email Elaine with any comments regarding implementation and/or timescales.

5. AUTOMATED VEHICLES BILL

Jan stated that the bill has completed, and is at the Report stage and should become law in the next Parliament. There is some comfort that the ideas from the Forum had been included. Mark Harper is overseeing the Bill, Jan requests the Forum send a letter to him asking what has driven the decision regarding the Advisory Council.

ACTION: Jan to draft a document for comment by Forum members.

6. RESPONSIBLE ACCESS FOR ALL.

Sharon brought Mission 5 of Country Land Associations Rural Powerhouse Campaign to the attention of the Forum for discussion as to the ways it affects landowners. The ELMS scheme has a low take up as it is too prescriptive and often detrimental to farmers. Sharon is concerned the voice of the Forum is not heard but Elaine stated it is effective and carries weight as an advisory body.

7. STREATLEY FOOTPATH 21.

Unfortunately, the weather has impacted the timetable for reinstatement of FP21, work will begin as soon as the flood water recedes.

8. MOWN VERGES UPDATE.

The Forum responded to a consultation last year and currently has not seen the report despite requesting it. WBC is seriously underrepresented on the Forum, the area has unique issues due to housing encroaching on the countryside and also rumours of a Sikh temple being built.

ACTION: Jan to write a letter to WBC Chief Executive seeking representation.

9. SUBMISSION PROTOCOL FOR CONSULTATIONS

Nicola brought this to the attention of the Forum following the requirement for a submission whilst the secretary was on holiday. It was agreed that in the absence of the secretary then the Chair followed by Vice Chair should make submissions. In extraordinary cases Elaine Cox, WBDC, could make the submission on behalf of the secretary.

10. WOKINGHAM DMMO UPDATE.

Since the departure of the ROW officer in August 2023 no DMMO's have been accepted by WBC. They should have been actioned within 28 days of submission and allocated a file number. Without this file number no resolution can begin. Nicola has provided a sample letter requiring editing with specific details prior to use. Landowners are not notified until the file number is allocated causing issues when ROW cross boundaries.

ACTION: Simon or Jan to draft a letter from the Forum using the draft provided by Nicola to WBC.

11. DISABLED ACCESS WORKING GROUP.

The report is a crossover with the ROWIP disabled report already mentioned. Jan offered her appreciation from the Forum for Margaret and Helen's tireless efforts in supporting disabled access enabling an aging population to continue to enjoy the countryside. Mark also commented it also allows MPV riders to continue to enjoy leisure sports. Greenham Common has waymarked 2 routes for less able walkers including those with sight issues and the RNIB is developing a system of coloured QR codes that can be picked

up by phone from a distance. Tony commented that disabled access toilets are also a concern. WBDC targets include continual contact with disabled groups. Many routes have only minor problems stopping access and could be quickly changed.

12. CROSS BOUNDARY LIAISON.

Reports have been circulated prior to the meeting.

Angus Ross has lost contact with Oxfordshire, Secretary to seek contact details for him.

ACTION: Secretary to seek contact details of Oxfordshire LAF.

13. WEST BERKSHIRE COMMONS.

Reports circulated prior to the meeting.

14. CONSULTATIONS SINCE LAST MEETING.

Proposed changes to legislation for electrically assisted pedal cycles.

Draft Local Transport Plan(LTP) consultation.

AOB.

West Berkshire Local Plan. Planning for 1500 houses and leisure facilities in NE Thatcham.

If planning is approved the Forum may need to be involved.

David Gardner, Chair of this Forum a few years ago has passed away.

New Ridgway Officer Ian Black is a keen cyclist.

WBS Local plan update, July at the earliest, more likely after the general election.