

# MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of Meeting of the Forum  
2pm Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

**Present:** Simon Pike (Chair), Margaret Pawson, Jan Heard, Helena Barker, Mark Bullen, Sharon Bovingdon, Tony Vickers, Nicola Greenwood, Janice Bridger, Angus Ross, Cllr Janine Lewis, Portfolio holder for Countryside (WBDC).

**In Attendance:** Sandra Griffin (Secretary), Elaine Cox (WBDC), Natalie Lucas (RBC), Lillian Green (RBC), Connor Clark (WBC)

**Apologies for absence:** Graham Smith, Donald Peck, Tim Lewis

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

Simon Pike welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Cllr Janine Lewis, portfolio holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside)

## QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC.

No questions.

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

None

## 3: CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES FROM SEP 2023 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING.

Minutes approved subject to the deletion of the last sentence in Item 8.

**Visorando:** Clarity as Simon Pike is not responsible for Thames Valley walk but does contribute to others.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING ACTION 3. Recruitment of Members of the LAF

Margaret mentioned that many parish councils replied to the draft ROWIP indicating their interest. New members to be sought by each local authority from the Parish Councils, however they will need to be appointed in agreement with all three local authorities. Also, Simon Pike will contact the Berkshire Association of Local Councils. The LAF is particularly short of landowner representative on the Forum.

**ACTION.** All 3 Local Authorities to seek interested people.

Simon Pike to contact BALC and Hungerford Town & Manor Constable.

Elaine Cox to add a sentence into bi-annual landowner mailing.

## 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.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING ACTION 6 DMMO SCOPING.

Simon Pike pointed out that the date 2031 is at least two general elections away and there may be changes in that time. Action ongoing.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING ACTION 7 GATES AT PYLE HILL.

Gates are legally installed as a limitation put in by the new developers. Action closed.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING ACTION 13 COMMONS REPORT

Constitution of commons outstanding by Simon Pike.

#### **4. READING ROWIP.**

The ROWIP was published in March 2023 and is now due its first review. Following a couple of high-profile issues, the ROWIP review should reflect the resulting learning outcomes. For example, ensure footpaths are maintained and safe and improve reaction times. Additionally, there need to be ongoing reviews of changes in Policy and Strategy, resulting in reviewed action plans/progress reports and priorities.

RBC are seeking assistance from WBDC with legal matters regarding PROWs, as this work is not a priority within RBC. Following a discussion within the Forum it was stated that there is a statutory requirement for someone to be responsible for PROW. Elaine Cox asked if there is a definitive map for Reading as this is a statutory requirement. Should a public enquiry happen then RBC could be in a very difficult situation. Jan Heard stated that it may be helpful to include a deadline in requests for legal help.

#### **5. WEST BERKSHIRE ROWIP.**

Formal consultation on draft finished end of November 2023. Consultant has created a table of responses, and the officers are working through each one making an action plan. Some responses are quick wins and can be done without going into the ROWIP. Timetable for document to go to Corporate Board at the beginning of March then onto Executive in May. Before going to the Board, a Delivery Plan is required. SMART targets are currently being discussed. Currently thinking there will be a report to the Forum at least once a year or possibly each meeting. Margaret asked about specific targets relating to disabled access. Various points made by the Forum are being addressed currently and will be reported upon. The ROWIP will guide the outstanding activities and the team expertise and knowledge will also have a say in the Delivery Plan. There will be more pro-active actions.

#### **6. LAWRENCES LANE.**

Janice seeking an update as the consultation period has ended. Experimental TRO started 1 July 2022 for 6 months. Then can be extended for a maximum of 18 months before it expires naturally. Simon pointed out that the comments made by the Forum have not been included in their report. There are no plans to extend the TRO. Bollards had been regularly stolen and alternative methods are being considered.

**ACTION** Simon Pike to write and ask what other methods are being considered and when they will be implemented.

#### **7. DRAFT LTP CONSULTATION - WOKINGHAM TRANSPORT PLAN.**

Nicola commented that there are a lot of positive points in the document, but they are slanted from the active travel point of view. Little consideration given to leisure and recreation. Most people are using and will continue to use the routes for recreation. Non-specific comments refer to shared use paths and do not mention the use of bridleways for horse riders. Jan Heard mentioned that by-ways are also used by people to get to work, Mark Bullen confirming that TRF members regularly use by-ways to get to and from work.

**ACTION** Nicola to prepare a draft document for comment by 10 February, to be uploaded by the due date of 23 February.

#### **8. REMOTELY OPERATED VEHICLES AND AI BILL.**

AI Bill currently going through Parliament. There seems little understanding of countryside and vulnerable users. Technology is moving very swiftly and there are concerns that countryside users are not being considered. Purpose of the Act is to set up a regulatory body. The Bill is currently with the House of Lords, at this point prior to a General Election it is not the best time as Members of Parliament may change. Simon stated that the regulation of autonomous vehicles is probably more relevant to the Forum rather than AI Bill itself.

**ACTION** Jan to keep an eye on its progress and watch for any MP interested enough to make amendments on the Bill.  
Jan to email a copy of the AI Bill to Janine Lewis.  
Jan/Simon to write and flag up early concerns to Richard Benyon.

#### **9. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK.**

Item has been included for the interest of the Forum. Paragraph 104 on PROW has not changed. Throughout the document the term 'beautiful' is used, therefore any objection could be made under the grounds of it not being beautiful, but this is subjective. The term Local Green Space is also used, a definition for this term is in the definitions section of the document.

#### **10. STREATLEY FP21**

Elaine commented that many of the planned work events have been delayed due to the ongoing wet weather. However, the bridge design has now completed, and it should be built over the summer of 2024. Towards the end of February, the path will be cleared of brambles, the rangers will then keep it cleared. Tree work will have to wait for the bird nesting to finish probably early Autumn. Margaret pointed out February 2024 is 20 years since first discussed.

**ACTION** Janine Lewis asked Elaine to include her in all correspondence and actions regarding Streatley FP21.

#### **11. BUCKLEBURY COMMON EIA SCREENING.**

Works on Bucklebury to clear trees to return common to Heathland. At this stage it is a screening process to determine if a thorough consultation needs to be taking place. The Forum regards the project to have the potential to have an impact on the common and as such should be a full consultation. Janice suggested the Forum should respond including access and recreation use on the common.

**ACTION** Simon to respond accordingly.

#### **12. DISABLED ACCESS REPORT.**

Report has been circulated prior to the meeting. Helen and Margaret offered their assistance with aspects of the ROWIP. The WBDC Condition Survey is relevant to accessible use of the countryside.

**ACTION** Helen and Margaret become involved when it is appropriate.

#### **13. CROSS-BOUNDARY LIAISON.**

All reports received have been circulated prior to the meeting.

Jan Heard offered her time to represent the Forum in cross boundary liaison with Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

This just leaves the Oxfordshire area without a Forum representative.

#### **14. COMMONS REPORTS.**

**Bucklebury:** See Agenda Item above.

Other Commons reports circulated prior to the meeting.

#### **15. NORTH WESSEX DOWNS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE.**

Item included for information only. National Landscape is a rebranding title, AONB still the legal name.

**ACTION** Sharon expressed an interest, Tony offered to send her a link.

## **16. UPDATES ON FORUM RESPONSES TO CONSULTATIONS.**

Lawrences Lane: See Item 6.

Local Plan: Plan has not accepted at regulation 18. No further action from the Forum.

Verges: Connor to chase up to date situation regarding verge cutting in Wokingham.

**AOB.**

Meeting closed at 16.59.

### **Meeting Dates for 2024.**

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May - Newbury hoping to be held in the Morrell Room, Streatley tba.  
Elaine to check if the booking is available.

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September Wokingham.