

# Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Review

1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum

Chairman: Richard Pushman

LAF Secretary: Jonathan Clark

Meetings: July 2019, November 2019 and March 2020.

- The total number of LAF members is 14, and includes:
- 7 Members representing users of public rights of way and access land, including:
  - British Horse Society
  - Ramblers
  - British Driving Society (Beds, Bucks & Herts)
  - Cycling UK
  - Disabled Ramblers
  - Trail Rider's Fellowship
  - Chiltern Society
- 3 Members representing owners and occupiers of access land, including:
  - Country Land & Business Association
  - Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust
  - National Trust
- 4 Members representing other interests, including:
  - 2 Buckinghamshire council members
  - Parish councils
  - Independent

## Improving public access: making a difference

The member representing the Chiltern Society advises the council on improvements relevant to donate-a-gate where stile removals would have the most public benefit.

The member representing disabled users tests routes throughout the year, reporting back on mobility scooter accessibility and improvements. This year surveys included the Waddesdon Greenway; Waddesdon Manor and Ethrope Park; footpaths between Wingrave to Rowsham; and the Jubilee River, near Maidenhead. The same member met developers at a public consultation seeking bridge improvements as part of the Hulcott Solar Park planning application; and the member for Cycling UK provided advice to the same application on cycling mitigation.

The LAF member for the British Horse Society responds to planning applications impacting bridleways: in particular, Buckinghamshire council and Network Rail seeking equestrian access along part of the Misbourne Greenway: a multi-user route between Wendover and Great Missenden. HS2 continue to be lobbied by the member representing the Chiltern Society to mitigate the impacts of construction on the bridleway network, such as planning temporary routes.

The LAF member for the British Driving Society commented on the Colne Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy consultation; and meets regularly with the Ridgeway Delivery Group to support their improvement works along the National Trail.

## The Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030

Information to support the new ROWIP was gathered up to 31<sup>st</sup> April 2019. Thereafter, the LAF contributed positively advising the council on amendments and additions to complete the assessment phase. The assessment included understanding the public's present and future needs; together with reviewing the condition of the network and relevant strategies.

An extraordinary LAF meeting was held on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019 to discuss emerging findings from the stakeholder and public engagement. This covered the draft plan structure, next steps and setting timelines. The findings of this meeting were discussed and approved at the formal 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019 LAF meeting.

The LAF's advice shaped the draft ROWIP prior to the formal public consultation between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 and 24<sup>th</sup> December 2019. Further comments were provided during the full public consultation phase, coinciding with the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2019 LAF meeting.

## Scrutiny

The LAF provides independent strategic oversight of the council's public access work across the county, which has multiple positive outcomes for public access. A standing item for LAF meetings provides officer updates from Definitive Map and Maintenance & Enforcement teams, through which the members monitor progress and provide advice on the work and priorities.

Regular bi-annual BVPI-type surveys provide 'Easy to Use' scores and every meeting is provided with a maintenance and improvement summary and major bridge / surfacing schemes for members to monitor progress.

## Training

Tom Bindoff and Chris Beney presented a lecture on 'Gates & Other Access Issues', including the 'least restrictive access' concept as part of 'BS5709: 2018 gaps, gates and stiles'. Members were provided with a virtual tour of Natural England's Aston Rowant gate demonstration area and an open invitation to visit.

## Priorities for the year ahead:

1. provide advice towards the ROWIP Action Plans;
2. maintain the profile of the LAF as an important consultee; and
3. monitor progress and provide ongoing advice to the new ROWIP.

## Comments from the appointing authority

The LAF membership remains experienced, well-balanced and well-informed to make good decisions and valuable advice to the council. We are lucky to have such a broad range of skills and knowledge.

Members hold the council to account, challenging the work and decision-making undertaken. Meetings attendance is good and supported by cabinet members and committee staff. We enjoy use of a 'speech to text' reporter to support members hard of hearing and ensure minute-taking is accurate.

There is much development pressure and major infrastructure, such as East West Rail, HS2 and Heathrow expansion, resulting in threats to a cohesive rights of way network. The LAF have been supportive and positive in their outlook when commenting on these pressures.

The LAF provided close scrutiny of the new ROWIP at each of the design and consultation phases and advised the council when drafting the new strategy.

We welcome the new member from Cycling UK and look forward to welcoming new cabinet members when the council transitions to the new unitary authority on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. Membership numbers continue to remain good at 14, though we would benefit from a young people's representative.

## Comments from the Chairman

This concludes my third annual report as chairman. A great many thanks go to our long-serving LAF volunteer members for their continued support, extended to support officers and our committed rights of way staff. The COVID-19 pandemic touched only briefly into this year, during the latter part of March 2020, and will therefore be covered in the 2020/2021 annual report.

Huge thanks also to the army of volunteers maintaining the network over and above that provided by the council, particularly the Ramblers and Chiltern Society, whose combined effort save the public purse many thousands of pounds. The excellent condition and improvements on the network is a proud reflection of their work and commitment.

The main work of the Forum this year oversaw the production of the new ROWIP 2020-2030, which I'm delighted to say was published on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. This was a mammoth effort and we look forward in the coming year to helping produce the 10-year Action Plan.

2020 sees the transition from 1 county and 4 district councils to a single unitary authority, which has been somewhat unsettling. Nevertheless, the Forum remains largely unchanged as a result of this political reorganization, but staff restructuring is likely to continue through 2020 and 2021. We enjoy good support within the council's committee structure for administration, and cabinet member attendance informs our debates greatly and is both reassuring and welcome.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Pushman', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Richard Pushman (Chairman)**