

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum Annual Review

April 2022 – March 2023

Chairman – *Neil Harris*

Vice-chairman - *David Briggs*

Meetings - *13th July 2022; 2nd November 2022; & 1st March 2023*

Membership [14] interests and organisations represented:

- *Country Land & Business Association*
- *National Trust*
- *British Horse Society*
- *Ramblers*
- *British Driving Society (Beds, Bucks & Herts)*
- *Cycling UK*
- *Disabled Ramblers*
- *Trail Rider's Fellowship*
- *Chiltern Society*
- *Buckinghamshire Council - Cabinet Member Transport*
- *Buckinghamshire Council - Member for The Risboroughs*
- *Parish councils*
- *Independent*
- *Independent [walkers, riders and equestrians]*

Meeting Diary

All meetings are held at 10am in the Paralympic Room, The Gateway, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF. Members of the public may attend in person or remotely having contacted the secretary in advance.

Dates of next meetings: 19th July 2023, 1st November 2023, 6th March 2024, 3rd July 2024 and 6th November 2024.

Guest Speakers and Advice

Members welcomed the following speakers on topics summarised below by number:

- Sarah Wright, Ridgeway National Trail Officer, Oxfordshire Council;
 - Ridgeway 50th Anniversary, promotional ideas
- Peter Beavon (KBI Flexipave, UK);
 - The suitability of Flexipave as a surfacing material for cycleways and bridleways
- Jonathan Fuller, Transport Strategy Lead Officer, Buckinghamshire Council;
 - High Wycombe Transport Strategy and LCWIP Consultation
 - Berryfields to Buckingham Cycleway
- Neil Jackson, Conservation and Landscape Officer, Chilterns Conservation Board;

- HS2 Additional Projects Funded projects, Ridgeway Riding Route, Wendover Canal Towpath Upgrade, Misbourne Greenway, Landscape and Biodiversity connectivity;
- James Spratley, Strategic Access Officer, Buckinghamshire council;
 - Utility of the Slow Ways national network of walking routes project
- Jonathan Clark, Senior Strategic Access Officer, Buckinghamshire council;
 - A Public Spaces Protection Order to temporarily close Footpath HWU/80/1 for additional 3 years
- Joanne Taylor, Rights of Way Operations Team Leader, Buckinghamshire council;
 - Clearance of overgrowth on footpath's and how to prioritise scant resources where landowners are responsible for maintaining hedge boundaries.
- Claire Hudson, Definitive Map and Highways Searches Team Leader, Buckinghamshire council;
 - Updates on DMMO applications, staff recruitment, and EWR

Observers attend from the British Horse Society and from a walker and horse rider based in Ellesborough.

Monitoring success

The regular business of the Local Access Forum includes updates from definitive map, strategic access and operations teams, with reports provided. Members provide feedback and ask a wider range of questions. In this way, progress, workloads and priorities are monitored by members.

Open access land advice

The Forum provided the National Trust and Forestry Commission with informal advice on their ash die-back felling proposals on Common Lane at West Wycombe Hill, which required some access closures. In addition, advice was provided to Natural England on open access restrictions at Wayside Farm and Chawley Manor Farm, Bledlow, two areas of chalk grassland near High Wycombe. This resulted in changes to the original proposals for the benefit of walkers.

National government

The Forum have been concerned locally with the progress of the HS2 and EWR rail projects. Regular updates are provided to the forum updating members on the council holding both Network Rail and HS2 to account, particularly with temporary, but long-term path closures.

Stewart Jackson was appointed on 25 April for a period of 3 years as the independent HS2 Residents' Commissioner who is tasked with overseeing and monitoring HS2's commitments to the people affected by the development. As such he will be an important contact to consult on emerging trends and concerns relating to the project in Buckinghamshire.

Mark Harper MP was appointed as Secretary of State for Transport on 25th October 2022. He stated that local impacts would be unavoidable on a project on the scale of

HS2, however, he expects HS2 Ltd. to do its utmost to reduce disruption where it is reasonable to do so and to treat communities affected by construction with respect, sensitivity, and professionalism.

Since the last annual report, the cut-off date for submission of Definitive Map Modification Orders has been reinstated but delayed from 2026 to 2031 which will likely be a topic of consolation for the LAF in 2023-2024.

Improving public access: making a difference

Members remain locally involved in the following voluntary activities:

1. publishing and leading walks in the Chilterns;
2. surveying promoted routes and completing Best Value Performance Indicator [BVPI] survey reports;
3. surveying and suggesting improvements to new cycling and walking routes;
4. attending Ridgeway National Trail Delivery Group meetings;
5. lobbying HS2 to address impacts of construction on equestrians; and
6. making DMMO applications.

Scrutiny

The LAF provides independent strategic oversight of the council's public access work. For example, the maintenance team provide a major works programme and minor works summary, together with Best Value Performance Indicator [BVPI] results. The Definitive Map Team list their workload and the LAF monitor progress of applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders [DMMO's], Public Path Orders [PPO's] and Village Greens [VG's].

Comments from the appointing authority

The ability to consult the Buckinghamshire LAF is an invaluable resource to Buckinghamshire Council and we continue to be very fortunate to have members with such a broad range of experience and expertise in countryside matters. We appreciate the balanced advice this generates, and much credit should be given to our retiring Chairman Mr Richard Pushman for his stewardship and dedication over many years.

We extend a warm welcome to long-time member and our newly elected Chairman, Mr Neil Harris, and look forward to his chairmanship of the LAF.

The council has attempted to recruit new members from underrepresented groups this year, particularly young people and members from diverse ethnic backgrounds, but have been unsuccessful. The council remains keen for prospective members to and observe the LAF prior to applying for membership.

Numbers continue to remain good at 14.

Members challenge and scrutinise the council and speakers. In this way the forum holds the council to account. At the same time, members understand pressures from increasing workloads and residents' high expectations.

Comments from the Chairman.

I would like to thank the outgoing chairman for his exemplary work overseeing the efficient running of the Forum for a number of years. I shall look forward to working with members and the council and am grateful to my vice-chair, David Briggs covering the 1st March 2023 meeting.

May I also thank members for their continued support to ensure we reach consensus and compromise during discussions.

I am grateful to Buckinghamshire council providing a meeting venue, secretariate, funding and cabinet member appointments to the Forum.

I would also like to thank our rights of way officers for their commitment to improving access and maintaining high standards, against a background of significant growth and national infrastructure pressures.

Neil Harris