

Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum

Information for applicants

Background

All Local Authorities and National Park Authorities are required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 ('CROW Act') to establish a Local Access Forum to provide strategic advice on 'the improvement of public access to land in that area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area, and as to such other matters as may be prescribed'. The membership of this group must be balanced between different interests in the countryside so that it can provide well-argued, unbiased advice. The Act requires Councils, Natural England and other organisations to take the forum's advice seriously.

Bedford Borough Council has decided to support a Forum for the geographical and administrative area of the Borough of Bedford. This forum will provide opportunities for both rural and urban residents to become involved in outdoor access and countryside recreation matters. This forum will be known as the 'Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum'.

Purpose of Forum

The aim of the Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum is:

'To provide guidance and contribute towards improving opportunities to enjoy the Borough of Bedford's countryside and open spaces and to improve the management of outdoor access throughout the Borough.'

The remit of the Local Access Forum is to:

- To perform a statutory duty to advise on the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area, as described in the Countryside and Rights Of Way Act 2000.
- Contribute in an advisory capacity to the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the Borough of Bedford.
- Promote the appropriate use of opportunities to enjoy the countryside, including appropriate use by people using cycles and walking with dogs.
- Advise upon the appropriate management and maintenance of access, balancing the provision of access against the needs of biodiversity, wildlife management and of land - owners and managers.
- Advise on developing additional opportunities for everyone to enjoy the rights of way and access network, in particular for those with disabilities.
- Work to ensure that the necessary resources are available to fulfil Forum aims and to deliver agreed improvements.

Membership of Forum

It is likely that the forum will often be discussing contentious issues and that their advice will guide policies and actions of Bedford Borough Council. Therefore, it is vital that the membership of the forum represents a wide range of interests and is balanced between the wish to increase access and the need to protect the landscape and its economic use. To ensure that this is achieved, the councils as appointing bodies have agreed that the forum should include representation of the areas of interest listed overleaf.

- Walking
- Walking/Dogs
- Cycling
- Equestrian (riding & driving)
- Motorised vehicle use
- Disabled access
- Ethnic minority groups
- Tourism
- Rural Business
- Conservation
- Land-owning/managing; up to six members, to include individuals and organisations
- Councillors; a maximum of two councillors from the appointing authorities

An ability for each member to recognise the validity of the views of others and to seek consensus will be vital, as will independence from the views of any particular organisation.

In addition to members of the forum, observers may attend meetings and can comment but cannot vote; these will include officers from the Borough Council and Natural England, who are overseeing Local Access Forums across the country.

Recruitment Process

The following process has been approved by Bedford Borough Council as the appropriate appointing authorities:

- a) A small group of officers was convened. This group followed all relevant regulations and guidelines to agree selection criteria, the contents of an application form, text for advertisements and for letters to all known contacts who may be interested in applying. Once the closing date has passed, the group will examine the applications and make recommendations for membership of the Borough of Bedford Local Access Forum.
- b) These recommendations from officers will form a report taken to Bedford Borough Council's Director of Environment and Communities, who will examine them to ensure that the criteria for appointments have been adhered to, and make comments as appropriate.
- c) Once the decision has been made, all applicants will be informed whether they have been successfully appointed to the forum or not.

Commitment

The forum will meet at least four times a year, probably mid-week daytime / evening meetings but this is to be determined by the members themselves. Members will be expected to attend all meetings but must attend a minimum of two per year; membership should be for an initial period of one to three years, and may be renewed. Members will be expected to actively seek the views of the interest group (not just one organisation) they represent and to spread news of the work of the forum. Please see the sheet titled "Members' Roles and Responsibilities" for further details.

For further information please contact:

Phill Fox
 Outdoor Access Development Officer
 Outdoor Access and Rights of Way Team
 Bedford Borough Council
 Borough Hall
 Bedford
 MK42 9AP

Tel ~ 01234 276070 or e-mail ~ phillip.fox@bedford.gov.uk