



Minutes of meeting held on 19th July 2023 in Borough Hall commencing at 6:30pm

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Members present:	Apologies received:
Bob Wallace – Chair of the meeting (BW) David Mitchell (DM) James Russell (JR) Barry Ingram (BI) Nigel Jacobs (NJ) Cllr Martin Towler (MT)	Ann Kennedy
In attendance/Observers:	
Andrew Prigmore - Bedford Borough Council (AP) April Quinn – Bedford Borough Council (AQ) Mark Poxton - Member of the public (MP)	
Clerk: Georgina McDade (GM)	

1.	<u>Welcome by Chairman</u> The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially to Cllr Martin Towler (MT) who was attending his first meeting. Minutes from the April 25th 2023 were agreed and signed. BW went through a brief history of the LAF and the purpose as an introduction to Cllr Towler. Reiterated LAF is here to assist and advise the Council regarding RoW, open spaces and access to the countryside. Members introduced themselves. BW advised a priority is to raise the LAF profile within parishes and the council.
2.	<u>Apologies</u> As above.
3.	<u>Item 2 - Governance</u> Confirmed only 3 members have returned membership forms. Secretary to re send further copies for members. Completed.


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4.	<p><u>Item 3 – RoWIP</u></p> <p>Greenwheel and cycling update AP advised there is no update since the last meeting.</p> <p>RoWIP Regarding Aim 3 of the RoWIP James queried what resources were available to the achieve the aims.</p> <p>AP advised that the items that are coloured red are ones to be dealt with every year. The remaining items are ones to improve the network. Some items will be left should funding become available so for example replacement bridges. The remaining aims are ones that are considered to be achievable. Would like the LAF to confirm what aims they would like to prioritise.</p> <p>BI asked who the RoWIP is aimed at and how it will reach the intended audience. AP advised the intended audience is interest groups, Parish Councils, User Groups. The LAF and Council need to consider how improvements/additions can be achieved especially with new developments, which the RoW team are actively pursuing.</p> <p>Cllr Towler advised that the Council could use the comms team and potentially DEFRA. Could lobby ministers and relevant Gov departments to put in to place guidance for new developments.</p> <p>JR suggested that there were potentially too many top priorities, which should perhaps be scaled back. AP advised the authority will assess what is achievable and what the main priorities should be. AQ advised that this is why the assistance of the LAF and their advice/input is needed.</p> <p>JR suggested that the priorities should be ranked in order as to how achievable and realistic each one is and focus on those. AP agreed.</p> <p>BI suggested that the design of new developments ought to be more rural to make them more appealing. NJ agreed and suggested that there should be conditions for new developments that RoWs should be automatically included in their planning applications and plans.</p> <p>AP confirmed that this is already being enforced. Negotiations are ongoing with new developments in Sharnbrook and Clapham. Advised this could be an added item to the RoWIP under aim 3.2 that developments need to include specific conditions.</p> <p>BW requested details on the next steps.</p> <p>AP confirmed the authority will re evaluate the priorities and will rank them. Will update the plan and bring to the next meeting for LAF to approve.</p> <p>MP suggested the use of QR codes and available technology that can be used to make RoW easier to navigate and use.</p> <p>BW suggested to add this in to the RoWIP.</p>
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	<p>Members agreed that BW will draft the foreword. Secretary to forward previous copy and annual report for assistance. Completed.</p> <p>NCN51</p> <p>AP advised there is no update since the last meeting. It is hoped that the new route from Wootton to Bedford should be complete by the end of the financial year.</p>
5.	<p><u>Item 5 – Relevant matters</u></p> <p>AQ updated members regarding the Excluded Area. LAF will be informed once work has completed. Once this has completed there will no longer be an Excluded Area. Ongoing.</p> <p>New routes</p> <p>Bob advised that members need to know how new routes/schemes can be pushed forward.</p> <p>Members went through the proposals that Barry had circulated. Andy advised that the Radwell-Bletsoe & Bromham suggested routes are potentially achievable.</p> <p>Members agreed that BW would write to the authority to advise the LAF would like to proceed with the Radwell-Bletsoe and Bromham routes as suggested. Secretary to forward letterhead to Bob so draft can be produced. Completed.</p> <p>MP asked if the Council requests any permissive routes first from land owners/developers. AQ advised that the team only ever request actual RoW because permissive routes can be withdrawn by the landowner.</p>
6.	<p><u>Item 4 - Countryside Access Team updates</u></p> <p>AQ provided brief update relating to ongoing matters. Bob queries the number of submissions to PINS. AQ explained the process the team have to follow when submitting matters to PINS that have objections outstanding.</p> <p>BW asked if the submissions are preventing the team from focusing on other work.</p> <p>AP advised that it is disappointing that the OSS, unlike other user groups, choose not to engage and work with the Local Authority to find a way forward on Public Path Orders etc. Much of the team's time is therefore taken up with preparing submissions, whereas we could be dealing with other areas of work.</p> <p>AP has a copy of the Guidance Notes that the OSS gives to its Local Correspondents. It can be seen in Annex 1, that the OSS are requesting the Local Correspondents to object to orders to increase costs and delay the process i.e. "By objecting to an order, and causing the costs to mount, you could to good effect be deterring the authority from making further orders".</p>

	<p>They also stated “Our default position is to oppose a path change unless there is clear public benefit. The reasons for this include the following—(a) Path changes are seldom made in the public interest, they are generally sought by owners and occupiers to satisfy their interests, and benefit to the public is rarely at the forefront of their minds”</p> <p>However, the legislation on Public Path Orders allows landowners to request changes to the existing Public Rights of Way.</p>
	<p>Other organisations such as the BHS and Ramblers engage with the Local Authority and generally support the work the team is undertaking.</p> <p>BW will raise the issue with the OSS at regional LAF meeting. Completed.</p>
7.	<p><u>Item 7 – Meetings</u></p> <p>n/a</p>
8.	<p><u>Item 6 – Volunteering</u></p> <p>It was agreed that volunteering would be a main item agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>Cllr Towler advised that Riseley Parish Council have taken control over volunteering to maintain the RoW. There is also a volunteering group in Thurleigh.</p> <p>BW asked if volunteers could be responsible for deciding the condition of RoW including bridges etc and carrying out any necessary works to bring in to a useable condition.</p> <p>Cllr Towler advised that’s the responsibility of the RoW inspector and not for volunteers.</p> <p>AQ suggested there could be a degree of responsibility whereby volunteers can raise an issue but they can carry out basic work like clearing. They would require their own insurance like Barry’s RIPPLE & associated volunteers as the Council cannot insure them.</p> <p>BW asked what capacity there is to get agreement between the Council and Parish Councils for parishes to carry out any work to bring RoW in to a useable condition.</p> <p>AP advised he will speak to other groups/colleagues about how we could move forward with volunteering groups working with the Council.</p> <p>BW advised that this would potentially satisfy Aim 4.2/4.3/4.4 of the RoWIP.</p> <p>Updated volunteering work schedule circulated to members.</p>
9.	<p><u>Future Agenda Items</u></p> <p>Volunteering</p>

	<p>ROWIP</p> <p>Routes</p> <p>Round Bedford route to be discussed under AOB</p>
10.	<p><u>Close of Meeting</u></p> <p>The meeting closed at 21.15</p>
	<p>Next Meeting date:</p> <p>Tuesday, 31st October 2023 - Committee Room 2 (room booking TBC)</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Signed: Date: 31/10/23</p>

