

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Third meeting of 2015/16
Meeting Room 3, County Hall, New Road, Oxford
Tuesday 19 January 2016
10am - 12.30pm

A G E N D A

2015 (3)

	Item	<i>Coffee/tea available from 09.45am</i>
10.00	1	Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest - to declare any personal or prejudicial interests
	2	Confirm the minutes of 22 Sept 2015 (2015/2)
10.10	3	Matters arising
10.30	4	OCAF's views on Countryside Access operational issues
11.00	5	Oral update on the Ramblers 'Big Pathwatch' campaign
11.15	6	Oral update on the Parish Path Warden scheme
11.20	7	Proposed amendment to OCAF Terms of Reference re membership terminations
12.00	8	Forward Planning
12.10	9	Agree date, time and location of future meetings: April 26 th , Eynsham and September –possible site visits?
12.15	10	Questions from members of public/observers

n.b. all times are indicative only

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum is a Local Access Forum - an independent advisory body, established and administered by Oxfordshire County Council to assist with improving access to Oxfordshire's countryside under s94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Contact any member via the OCAF Secretariat: Oxfordshire County Council, Countryside Service, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Oxford OX29 4TL. Tel 01865 810226, email: countryside@oxfordshire.gov.uk or visit www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE SECOND MEETING OF 2015/16
Tuesday 22nd September 2015, Signal Court, Eynsham

2015 (2)

Attending:

Members and their interest areas:

Stuart McGinness, Vice-chair (SMG) User – Off-road cycling and cycle training
Sarah Martin (SM) – User –Walking and botany, permissive access
John Griffin (JG) – User – Cycling, walking and protected areas
Dave Cavanagh (DC) – User– Walking and practical voluntary action on paths
Nigel Fisher (NF) – Landowner – Estate management and conservation research
Andrew Hawkins (AH) – Landowner – Small woodland management

Oxfordshire County Council Officers attending to support OCAF

Hugh Potter – OCC Countryside and Records Manager (HP)
Jackie Smith – OCC Assistant Rights of Way Field Officer
Paul Harris – OCAF Secretary/ OCC Countryside Access Team Leader (Acting)(PH)
Adam McQueen – OCC Access Data Management Officer (for item 7)

1. Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest

SMG welcomed all present to the meeting and introductions were made. PH informed the group that apologies had been received from Troth Wells, Cllr Rodney Rose, Cllr David Nimmo-Smith, Gordon Garraway, Anne Luttmann-Johnson, Matthew Judson, Philip Chamberlain, Christopher Gowers, Harry St John. Regular observer Chris Marriage from Mid and West Berkshire LAF also sent his apologies.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Confirm the minutes of 7th April 2015: Confirmed

3. Matters arising

2015(1)1 - JG had tried to look at the permissive path information but was unsure how to prioritise as there were many categories of routes. NF highlighted the changes to Countryside Stewardship expected in January 2016 which may make the agreements' expiry date meaningless. This may be something for future meetings as PH said that he wanted access land permissive links to become linear access land corridors like at Gatehampton.

2015(1)2 - No summer visit occurred letter re standards not sent. This may feature in next steps re priority and caseload management.

2015(1)3 - Marcham Rushey Mill - HP informed the group that a structural survey had been carried out re extent of repairs and associated costs. He and PH would be working together to ensure progress with landowner and agent. HP further explained that insurance and liability to repair a listed structure were not probably relevant as the structure had not actually collapsed. The group thanked HP for continuing to take action.

2015 (1) 4 – LTP – PH said that this action wasn't completed but that the Local Transport Plan 4 had now been adopted. There were cross-references to the Rights of Way Management Plan and users in the document.

2015 (1) 5 – Invite OCAF members to local rights of way meetings - Actioned

2015 (1) 6 – attending neighbouring meetings – not actioned. PH encouraged members to attend neighbouring meetings, particularly Bucks and Gloucestershire

Monitoring Group Review – HP informed the group that he had received comments from many attendees of the Monitoring Group and that the decision was pending. There was a lot to consider and both groups were of value. SMG asked if the report could be issued as soon as possible. He also added that as budgets were being cut and officers' time pressured even more then changes should be considered necessary. PH gave Gordon Garraway's comments from email where he had said he wasn't convinced of any quantifiable savings and that OCAF would have to have longer meetings and a larger group.

<p>4. Rights of Way Management Plan – OCAF's views on draft priority caseload management approach document</p>

PH introduced the document and summarised the key parts of the accompanying narrative in the report and how these linked to the draft document. JG asked if and how people would be told about the priority of the issue they submit. PH replied that once an issue had been assessed then the priority would be recorded –and would likely feature on the new CAMSWeb system.

SMG suggested that the hazard issue assessment could be better tied into the table and with some more explanation about how the priorities would be dealt with. AH added that timescales are a problem and there was need to manage expectations. PH noted the suggestions and explained that there was a second stage to the priority review process which would look at how the team was able to better process its caseloads and if any timescales were able to be put on priorities. SMG added that transparency was important and team needed to follow some guidelines and everyone should know what rules are being followed.

DC asked if the lower priority issues were something that volunteer groups and local councils could act in. PH said yes and this is something covered in the Rights of Way Management Plan as well as the new 'Oxfordshire Together' approach that Oxfordshire County Council is developing for many highway functions. DC added that in his experience he had few complaints about how the team worked and there was value in a document that offered increased ways of making the most of opportunities. For small patches of nettles he suggested that parish council or volunteers such as the Vale Ramblers could and should do something about. What it did need was a sea change in the way that area rights of way are managed.

HP stressed that senior management continued to support partnerships and use the Ramblers' Parish Path Warden scheme as an exemplar. He raised the area of cuts to all budgets in the authority which the Leader of the Council would be publicising in the coming months.

SMG summarised the feedback from OCAF as the document having a strong structure which should be a good base for a consistent approach. Some amendments to the documents clarity are needed plus improved explanation. PH thanked Members for their input.

5. Big Pathwatch

PH showed the group the latest information from the Ramblers' project and showed them the information on the organisation's website. He advised that officers were starting to triage the most important new issues and add them to their caseloads. There were no questions.

6. Public Rights of Way affected by development

Dave Cavanagh introduced the item and said that the team had to deal with many applications. He cited Defra Circular 1/09 where public rights of way should run through landscape areas away from vehicular traffic and retain character. PH referred the group to the two OCC PRow standardised planning response documents contained in the meeting papers and said that the team tried their best to protect and improve rights of way when affected by developments large and small. PRow were included in para 75 of the National Planning Policy Framework "*Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.*" which is the relevant national planning policy.

PH responded to various questions by DC; PH explained that Field Officers work directly with local planning authorities when making representations about small scale developments and this includes making objections. Officers also promote conditions and obligations relating to rights of way; Officers notify planning enforcement officers if there are planning breaches. He added that in the past officers have instigated rights of way enforcement on obstructed paths such as at Tetsworth Golf Course. DC thanked PH for the replies and the information and stated he was happy with the approach by OCC to protect rights of way.

7. Demonstration of CAMSWeb

Adam McQueen gave a demonstration of the new CAMSWeb online access map and online issue reporting system [available at <https://camsv.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>]. He explained that the system provided a way to significantly reduce staff time currently spend manually processing emails and letters in order to get the information into the database (CAMS - Countryside Access Management System) which meant that time could be spent investigating issues in the field. OCAF members welcomed the new system and looked forward to it going live and helping officers to manage workloads better. The group thanked Adam for his presentation.

8. Forward Planning

The papers supplied re cycling on footpaths were not discussed but members felt that an agenda item on this for a future meeting may be useful, depending on the amount of discussion at the forthcoming Monitoring Group meeting on 16th October. JG said that he hoped that the issue could be look at constructively. SMG added that some riders will continue to have to use footpaths as an alternative to hazardous road use. DC cited his Thames Path experience where he couldn't hear cyclists approaching from behind and that there was a need to improve interactions in a shared confined space.

9. Next meetings

10am on 19th January at County Hall. April and September meeting dates to be confirmed

With no additional questions the meeting closed at 12.30pm

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 4

Date: 19th January 2016
Title: OCAF's views on Countryside Access operational issues
Author: Paul Harris, Countryside Access Strategy & Development Officer

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council is having to make £50m savings in the four years between 2016/17 and 2019/20. A £40k reduction to public rights of way budgets was included in a recent consultation called 'Talking Oxfordshire'. Since then the saving has increased to £70m and it is expected that the savings will be brought forward.

Impacts

The £40k saving will come from Countryside Access operational budget. Assuming capital allocation for bridges remains then this will leave an annual PRow works budget of £90,000. This is considered reasonable enough to be able to provide an acceptable level of core access functions. However the Team needs to review what and how it undertakes its work.

Action for OCAF

Extracts from the current Countryside Access Team Plan are printed overleaf. Members are requested to discuss those objectives and activities where they feel work could be reduced or undertaken by other organisations or even stopped altogether. In addition those areas deemed to be of greatest importance may also be highlighted. This is just an opportunity for early discussion and it ties in to previous work on issue prioritisation, caseload management and path categorisation

Next steps

Officers will listen to the comments of OCAF and use them to help inform the ongoing process of operational review. An update will be provided at the next OCAF and Rights of Way Monitoring Group.

Extract from the Countryside Access Team Service Resource Plan April 2015 to March 2017

The Team works to meet the vision and aims of the adopted **Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 (RoWMP)** which in term meet the aims of the Council Plan:

RoWMP Vision: To record and maintain the existing public rights of way and countryside access network for all users and would-be users, and where possible improve the extent, facilities, use and understanding of the network, so that public rights of way fulfil their role as a vital part of life in the County.

RoWMP Aims:

1. Public rights of way are recorded, protected, maintained, promoted, and improved when opportunities arise
2. A public rights of way and countryside access network that adapts to balance the current and future needs of communities and users, farmers and landowners and the natural and historic environment
3. A public rights of way and countryside access network which is reasonably accessible to those with limited mobility, vision or understanding
4. Countryside access contributes to a thriving local economy and communities are able to be actively involved in caring for and promoting responsible walking and riding in their area.

Key Team Objectives

1. To assert and protect public rights of way in accordance with statutory public duties
2. To sign, repair, maintain and improve public rights of way in accordance with statutory public duties
3. To provide a specialist and rapid response sub-team unit ["Countryside Tasks Team"] to support statutory public duties and wider countryside access team responsibilities
4. To inform, support and enable land managers to understand and adhere to their responsibilities for public rights of way
5. To work with planners and developers to protect and enhance the rights of way network through the planning process
6. To keep accurate and contemporary records about public rights of way infrastructure and management and make these available when appropriate
7. To support and enable local communities, volunteer groups, and other interested organisations to manage, use and improve countryside access and public rights of way
8. To provide and promote relevant advice, information and guidance about public rights of way and countryside access to professionals, councillors, staff, members of the public, local councils and interested organisations
9. To prioritise support for the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails and corridors as key economic assets, and support other key named longer distance routes and circular routes

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 7

Date: 19th January 2016
Title: Proposed amendment to OCAF Terms of Reference re membership terminations
Author: Paul Harris, OCAF Secretariat

Introduction

The Appointing Authority (Oxfordshire County Council) considers that there is a need to alter the terms of reference for OCAF members as a number of members have not turned up for a number of meetings. Currently, these members cannot have their membership terminated if they have sent through apologies in advance. The challenges of volunteer's time allocation are well understood but non-attending members prevent new members being recruited, skew the balance of the group, and represent additional costs from postage to room hire provision.

Options

OCAF's Chair or the appointing authority (Oxfordshire County Council) could approach low or non-attending members and ask them to attend regularly or consider resigning their membership. Additionally or alternatively the Terms of Reference could be altered to enable members to have their membership terminated after a smaller number of non-attendances as per Regulations. The relevant sections are:

a) OCAF's Terms of Reference

5.14 Members may have their appointments terminated because of prolonged unauthorised absences from meetings or misconduct. Removal of members from the Forum must be agreed in writing by the Chair, Vice-chair and the County Council.

b) The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007

4.—

(1) Save as provided in this regulation, the terms of appointment of a member of a local access forum shall be determined by the appointing authority and notified to him in writing.

(4) An appointing authority -

(b) may terminate the appointment of a member of a forum if -

(i) without the consent of the appointing authority, he has been absent from all meetings of the forum during a period of one year;

Recommended action

- 1) OCAF Chair and OCC to write to all non-attending members to encourage them to attend or to resign their membership
- 2) OCAF Members to discuss and consider adopting the proposed amendment to para 5.14 of the Terms of Reference:

“5.14 Members may have their appointments terminated by the Appointing Authority if he/she has been absent from all meetings of the forum during a period of one year. The Appointing Authority will seek the views of the Chair before terminating any LAF member's appointment”