

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Second meeting of 2015/16
Countryside Offices, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham OX29 4TL
Tuesday 22 September April 2015
10am - 12.30pm

A G E N D A

2015 (2)

	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 7 th April 2015 (2015/1)
10.10	3	Matters arising
10.30	4	Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan – OCAF’s views on revised Priority Caseload Approach document
11.00	5	Update on the Ramblers ‘Big Pathwatch’ campaign
11.20	6	Public Rights of Way affected by developments
11.45	7	Demonstration of CAMSWeb (online issue reporting)
12.00	8	Forward Planning
12.10	9	Agree date, time and location of future meetings: 19 January Oxford, April and September – with possible site visits. Local RoW meeting dates
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 FIRST MEETING OF 2015/16
Tuesday 7th April 2015, County Hall, Oxford
2015 (1)

Attending:

Members and their interest areas:

Troth Wells, Chair (TW) - User – Horseriding
Stuart McGinness, Vice-chair (SMG) User – Off-road cycling and cycle training
Sarah Martin (SM) – User –Walking and botany, permissive access
Gordon Garraway (GG) –Other – Green space protection and recreational trails
John Griffin (JG) – User – Cycling ,walking and protected areas
Dave Cavanagh (DC) – User– walking and practical voluntary action on paths
Christopher Gowers (CG) – User -

Guests and observers

Hilary Phillips (HPh) – Wild Oxfordshire
Matthew Judson (MJ) – 4x4 user interest. Application pending for OCAF Membership

Oxfordshire County Council Officers attending to support OCAF

Paul Harris – OCAF Secretary/ Countryside Access Team Leader (interim)(PH)

1. Election of Chair and Vice-chair

The Group elected Troth Wells as Chair and Stuart McGinness as Vice-chair for another year.

2. Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest

TW welcomed all present to the meeting and introductions were made. PH informed the group that apologies had been received from Cllr Rodney Rose, Cllr David Nimmo-Smith, Anne Luttmann-Johnson, Philip Chamberlain, Harry St John, Nigel Fisher and Clare Mowbray. . Regular observer Chris Marriage from Mid and West Berkshire LAF also sent his apologies.

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Confirm the minutes of 13th January 2015

Confirmed with minor typographical errors on pages 1 and 3.

4. Matters arising

Most actions were reported to have been completed and for the cycling officer action a response was expected from Cllr Nimmo-Smith in due course. For Action 4, PH suggested that the new national trail partnerships could be encouraged to produce clear information. For action 7 and 9, PH had asked NF to follow this up. For action 8, PH would email SM and JG with the web address for permissive routes and a suggestion for how to undertake the work.

Action 1: PH to email SM and JG with permissive path website information

Action 2: PH to check with NF re summer site visit and letter re standards of provision

For action 3, GG thanked officers for the clarification and asked what happens for longer term temporary closures. PH said that after the second temporary closure officers normally had to go to Secretary of State for extension. If a permanent closure was needed then officers would normally have to go down the consultation route. PH agreed to ask colleagues for an update on the Marcham bridge situation.

Action 3: PH to ask colleagues for update on the Marcham bridge closure

CG asked if some LAF members are members of the Ridgeway Partnership. This was confirmed but PH pointed out that the Partnership wasn't able to have a specific LAF member. He also informed the group that the Thames Path Partnership was moving along a few steps behind the Ridgeway. GG informed the group that the Ridgeway Forum was to be reinstated and that membership of the Forum was wider than for the Partnership. DC and SMG undertook to report back from future Partnership meetings.

For action 5, TW informed the group that the list of anomalies had been received but it was not in a useful format. PH suggested that TW and SMG could think about how they might find the information easier to understand they could then let the Definitive Map Team know.

For action 7, CG asked if printed versions of the Rights of Way Management Plan were produced. PH said no, but he would be happy to print copies off for anyone who didn't have one. All OCAF members should have had one by now anyway.

GG pointed out that the current Local Transport Plan (LTP) has very little in it about public rights of way, despite the work contributed to previous versions. He said that CPRE had drawn attention to this deficiency in its response to the Local Transport Plan. JG said that it was a great shame, particularly as there had been national acknowledgement of the good integration of previous rights of way in Oxfordshire's LTP. GG suggested that OCAF should write a letter expressing shock and disappointment that this version has slipped back from the original, CG and TW pointed out that Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans are important at the county and district level.

Action 4: TW and PH to write a response to the LTP re-joining up with the RoWMP

For the summer site visit, support was given to the Wytham Wood tour. Suggestions were also made for something in the Banbury area for canal towpath work and possibly Charlbury as a Walkers are Welcome town.

5. Rights of Way Management Plan – OCAF's views Issue Impact Assessment and Prioritisation

PH introduced the document, summarised the background of the part of the Rights of Way Management Plan that set the review out, and went through the four questions that he said would assist OCC in that evaluation.

TW reiterated the value of the OCC Countryside Access Team but said that she was worried that the work of the team was not seen as a priority by the county council. JG said that he understood the difficulties and pressures that the team faced but also that core task 3 (support for communities) could be increased. He acknowledged that there were no quick fixes and that the team managed its responsibilities thoughtfully. He felt that there should be more priority and resources but he understood the realities of council funding.

CG said the report was useful to see how the team worked. The core task 3 reflected a wider perspective and there were opportunities to gain from the multiplier effect of work from groups such as AONB volunteers. CG stated that the path categorisation proposal risked creating a sink hole for the lowest category paths. PH clarified that the core tasks were

cross-team and that some different officer types (e.g. Field Officers) did much more work to support communities.

DC said that he was broadly supportive of prioritisation and pointed out that the paths at the bottom of the table had the potential to be worked on by volunteers who wanted to make access better. He said that he wished the field officers could be more proactive in finding work and gaining landowner permission for volunteer groups to undertake work. He highlighted his group's work to clear a tarmac path to a health centre that should have been cleared by OCC highways. SM pointed out that a really good clearance was made from Warborough to Roke but with no advertising or information saying who had done the work – which was a missed opportunity.

SMG said that the performance standards for summer vegetation clearance (which have separate priority 1-4) should be publicised and performance against those standards monitored and reported on – and this should be subject to periodic review and identification of the actual aim of the county council in this work. He suggested that the percentage for the core tasks is less relevant because it varied so much for each type of countryside access officer. MJ said that his organisation had insurance for hand clearance of paths under core task 3 and obtained clarification by PH on core task 4 as being database maintenance and development of cyclical programmes such as bridge inspection and repair. GG added that core task 3 should be increased and gave the example of a good improvement project at Launton which gave access to a post office. He urged that with the reduction in OCC funding, more effort should be allocated to task 3 for officers to work with local communities in identifying improvements to rights of way which benefited the community and which could qualify for funding from such bodies as TOE2 and WREN. TW said that there should be more support for parishes. PH thanked members for their comments and pointed out that the team promoted the TOE scheme with examples of projects on their website, working closely with TOE and assessing and guiding projects. Over 70 parishes and organisations had benefited from TOE and OCC scheme and applications were continuing with four applications for the next Board meeting.

OCAF's responses to the questions were:

1. *Does the split of overall team time between all four core tasks seem reasonable?*
The group felt that the core task 3 was too low. Despite explanations that some officers may allocate around 30% of their time, the group wanted this to be increased across the team especially when it helped achieve other core tasks
2. *Should the Issue prioritisation be solely based on hazard/public safety? |*
The group felt that 'solely' should be removed -but that the main focus should be on public safety. The group felt that the list on the first page of the document reflected a good approach that had that main focus on safety but was able to take account of other factors. The group didn't want path improvements to be such a low priority that they were not invested in as most helped resolve some problems on the network. Improvements can also receive s106 or CIL funding and may also help deliver biodiversity benefits alongside access. The MENE database was identified as a possible way for access to be targeted.
3. *How would the path categorisation approach assist in the management of the network?*
The group felt that all paths were valuable and all needed to be managed by the highway authority. Although this approach was about managing issues, it was felt that it could be perceived as categorising paths which would inform how they were managed rather than categorising the issue. It was also felt that a lot of time and resources could be spent on the work which might drive actions in the wrong direction. Overall it was felt that this approach didn't currently appear to offer any real value.
4. *Is it ever acceptable for issues to be treated as network database updates with no*

expectations that issues will be acted on?

The group felt that it was important for the authority to value all reports that were made about the network as they were a freely given resource. Improvements should be made to the Parish Path Warden scheme to get them surveying more and to be more proactive in using volunteers to survey items on the council's behalf. Compiling information about issues also helps with resourcing of the team's work.

PH thanked the group for their input and asked them to check the minutes to ensure he had captured what they had said.

6. Review of Oxfordshire Monitoring Group

PH introduced Hugh Potter's paper and with TW gave a brief background to the group and why it was felt that its operation needed to be reviewed. He invited comments so that they could inform Hugh's report to the Monitoring Group on 24th April.

GG said he was totally opposed as the groups had different functions. In his view the Monitoring Group (MG) looked at caseload with members representing their organisations whilst OCAF had members representing interests who looked at more strategic issues in a participatory and cooperative way. CG confirmed the background to the group as he had been the lawyer on the group some forty years when it operated as more of a peace treaty approach when Berks, Oxfordshire and City adopted common ground to rights of way. It was then chaired by the Deputy County Surveyor who ensured that things 'got done'. He hoped that the MG helped with the management of rights of way and questioned how things would improve with proposed changes.

GG said that MG received detailed lists of Definitive Map Order changes and comments were encouraged. He felt that this side of the meeting might take too long and alter OCAF meetings. TW said it was worth trying. PH circulated notes from Buckinghamshire's LAF meeting where reports were circulated and said that from his observation it worked well. Notes from the last MG were also circulated to show what was discussed. DC added that he had consulted the Ramblers footpath secretaries on this issue. They were supportive of discontinuing MG as long as OCAF would have time to discuss PRoW issues to the extent necessary. DC suggested that specific issues (which currently featured in MG) might be better discussed at the relevant local area rights of way meetings, and that every encouragement should be given by OCC to encourage participation by the public in local area meetings. SMG said that receiving such reports and having more officers there might help OCAF members understand the operation better and help them be more effective.

GG stated that if the majority of the group were happy to change then he would agree to this, but suggested that it should be chaired by a deputy director or other senior manager or OCC cabinet member. *[post meeting note – OCAF has to have an independently elected Chair which should not be a member of the appointing authority nor an officer]*. TW said that OCAF needs to push access and rights of way and the seriousness of its proper management. She added that people from MG could always be invited as observers on those occasions when reports or caseload were being discussed. SM said that staff time was valuable and CG added that volunteer time was even more precious and scarce. JG said that it was good to review the effectiveness of the groups and mixing them may be a good thing. TW said that receiving reports is the focus of MG but MG and OCAF members could do more to read them beforehand and just raise key issues.

CG said that OCAF was independent and also had a duty to advise all s94 bodies, not just the highway authority. HPh suggested that specific local issues could be taken to the local area rights of way meetings unless they raised a wider issue when they should be raised at

unconfirmed

MG or OCAF. GG said he welcome the opportunity to discuss rights of way issues in more depth at the local meetings.

The group queried the local area rights of way meetings and PH undertook to circulate information and encourage colleagues to invite relevant OCAF members.

Action 5: PH to circulate OCAF member details to Field Officers and encourage invitations to local area meetings if there was capacity

Action 6: All OCAF members to consider attending neighbouring LAF meetings – especially Bucks and Gloucestershire

7. LAF Handbook: postponed to a future meeting

8. Annual Report: PH to send SMG the template

9. Next meetings

Confirmed as 22 September and 19th January at County Hall. Summer site visit to be confirmed

The meeting closed at 12.35pm

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 4

Date: 22nd September 2015
Title: OCAF's views on draft Rights of Way Priority Caseload Approach document
Author: Paul Harris, Countryside Access Team Leader (Acting)

Introduction

The County Council adopted the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 (RoWMP) on 25th November 2014. OCAF played a key role in developing the revised document. One of the most pressing actions outlined in the RoWMP is for the Countryside Access Team (CAT) to review and improve how it manages its caseload and how issues are prioritised and managed – in the light of statutory responsibilities, increasing public expectations and decreasing resources.

At OCAF's last meeting on 7th April 2015 a paper entitled 'OCAF's views on Issue Impact Assessment and Prioritisation' was discussed. OCAF gave its answers to the four questions in that. With regard to priority setting the questions and associated answers were:

Qu2: Should the Issue prioritisation be solely based on hazard/public safety?

The group felt that 'solely' should be removed -but that the main focus should be on public safety. The group felt that the list on the first page of the document reflected a good approach that had that main focus on safety but was able to take account of other factors. The group didn't want path improvements to be such a low priority that they were not invested in as most helped resolve some problems on the network. Improvements can also receive s106 or CIL funding and may also help deliver biodiversity benefits alongside access. The MENE database was identified as a possible way for access to be targeted.

Qu4. Is it ever acceptable for issues to be treated as network database updates with no expectations that issues will be acted on?

The group felt that it was important for the authority to value all reports that were made about the network as they were a freely given resource. Improvements should be made to the Parish Path Warden scheme to get them surveying more and to be more proactive in using volunteers to survey items on the council's behalf. Compiling information about issues also helps with resourcing of the team's work.

Since that meeting, officers from CAT have looked at the unpublished priority guidelines that were developed in 1997 and have produced a new draft version that takes account of the ways of working, and significant increase in demands, expectations and caseloads since the 1990s, as well as the comments made by OCAF. It is hoped that the final version will help better manage expectations and provide improved consistency and transparency. A second stage will look at how the CAT can more efficiently and effectively operate and manage rights of way operations.

The Priority Caseload Approach document

See attached draft version with comment numbering:

1. This approach is about the holistic protection, management and improvement of the rights of way network – not just dealing with current and backlogged issues. This is so that the Team and the authority is able to report more 'visibly' on more of its functions rather than just focusing on issues. This brings in for example the priority repeat vegetation clearance as well as priority planning related work and the work that officers do to support local communities and volunteer groups working on public rights of way – as much of this work isn't so visible or a part of the current reporting approach. All of these areas of work place

demands on officers' time and so will need choices to be made about what can and cannot be committed to.

2. The introductory sections repeats the text in the adopted RoWMP as it is important to show the link between this approach and the RoWMP.
3. This section explains how identified issues will be assessed and what goes into the assessment of relative priority. Using this risk-based approach helps officers and others to decide what is an actual problem and what is more of a perceived problem. It doesn't commit the CAT to inspecting every issue as officers are more able to benefit from extensive records, knowledge of the network and the route's context, as well as volunteer and community surveyors inspecting and photographing issues.
4. The section contextualises the caseload of the Countryside Access Team being wide-ranging but it all using the same (and limited) officers time and available budget.
5. The priority category table lists nine sub categories within five priority categories. The reason for developing two sub categories for priorities two and four is to move away from the linear 1-5 approach used previously whereby it was always assumed that lower priority issues would be tackled after higher priority issues (unless justified) and priorities would therefore be tackled in a line from one to five. This approach also enables the team to bring in non-issue derived caseload areas of work into reporting and justify the value of them being worked on or not worked on.

Public safety issues that pose a likelihood of actual significant injury are those that feature as **priority ones**. Note that this is likely to focus on the specific factor that makes the issue a priority 1 and needs action to resolve that 'danger'. This might well mean the physical closure of a hazardous crossing or structure etc. or its complete removal –it doesn't necessarily mean a full replacement as a high priority. By having three sub-categories in **Priority two** it enables a focus on those areas of work that do not feature in area reporting - especially priority vegetation clearance, serious cropping defaults and priority planning related work, to also be included and shows that they can be treated more equally. **Priority three** is meant to capture those issues that although a problem, are not so serious or hazardous as to warrant urgent or immediate attention. **Priority fours** are there to capture those work areas or issues that could benefit from being packaged up to make best use of resources (e.g. signing, bridge replacement/repair or waymarking programmes) or a less hands-on approach (e.g. letter of advice to occupier, possibly without prior inspection) or the lower priority vegetation clearance that is part of a programme of known needs, but that will only get done as resources permit. Improvements would normally fit into this priority – subject to point 7. **Priority five** is there as a means to acknowledge that an issue has been identified but that doesn't warrant database update or any action by the CAT. Needless to say, the assigned priority can be reviewed upwards and downwards and this priority tracking is an area of development work for the CAT so that these movements can be better recorded.

6. Keeping caseloads and performance monitored and under review is important in order that the CAT and stakeholders can see how the overall network is being managed within available resources. As with every other area of local authority and government work the focus will be on higher priority areas - but still investing some proportion of time in lower priority areas of work, especially to encourage and support local communities and organisations, volunteers groups, landmanagers and individuals where that investment of staff time or budget can add value to the work that the CAT does.

Action

OCAF Members are invited to consider and discuss the attached revised draft Priority Caseload Approach document and, if agreed; to recommend its use by officers as the basis to refine the management of workloads and caseloads; to recommend any amendments to its content or layout; or to make any other recommendation.

DRAFT

PRIORITY CASELOAD APPROACH FOR PROTECTION, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS ON THE OXFORDSHIRE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK

Oxfordshire County Council's statutory duty for public rights of way under the Highways Act 1980 centres on ensuring that, across the network, rights are not obstructed and routes are maintained in a reasonable condition. This Priority Caseload Approach document is intended to manage expectations and give guidance to officers and others involved in the fulfilment of that duty in a transparent and fair way. It is intended to encompass the majority of the Countryside Access Team's (CAT) work through this approach, not just the priority of reported issues.

Comment [PH1]: OCAF 1

The County Council's strategy for the protection, maintenance and improvement of public rights of way is set out in the adopted Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 (RoWMP). The Plan's **Vision** is *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.*

The four **Aims** of the RoWMP are :

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.

Comment [PH2]: OCAF 2

The majority of public rights of way (PRoW) issues reported to the County Council or identified through internal inspections will be prioritised or programmed after the issue has been assessed. This assessment may use supplied reports, photos, database records, and site visits to help in the determination and will normally consider one or more of the following factors where they are relevant:

- Overall level of hazard or actual risk that the issue (if a safety matter) represents
- The degree of obstruction
- The cause and likely duration of the issue
- The character of the route, its normal use and the route's normal state of repair
- The impact of the issue looking at the wider network

Comment [PH3]: OCAF 3

In addition to addressing reported issues, the CAT commits significant resources to maintenance and repair work such as bridge repair and replacement, vegetation clearance, surfacing and drainage, signing, as well as responding to large and small planning applications and liaising with and supporting community and volunteer groups. All of this work is part of officers' caseload but all of this places demands on CAT officers and involves choices being made about the use of resources and relative priorities.

Due to the nature of rights of way and the wide range of local circumstances it is unrealistic to set out hard and fast lists of issues or work areas and their associated priority. However using the factors above the following guidelines table will help develop and maintain a more consistent approach across the CAT.

Comment [PH4]: OCAF 4

Priority caseload approach table

Comment [PH5]: OCAF 5

Priority Category	Guideline circumstance
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incident where an accident has occurred resulting in significant injury • Issue with high likelihood of imminent accident resulting in significant injury
2a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue with greater possibility of accident resulting in significant injury
2b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority Repeat Process - Higher priority maintenance task such as key route vegetation clearance that comes up each year or more regularly
2c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-hazardous but significant or time-limited issue e.g. likely to completely obstruct access very soon
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesser hazard/lesser significance issue that affects a PRow but does not completely obstruct it
4a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area or bulk processing - issue such as signing or furniture that can be packaged together with others
4b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat Process - Lower priority maintenance task such as less frequent vegetation clearance that comes up regularly
4c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity - Improvement or minor repair issue
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Action intended/Record update – very minor issue

Priority derived caseloads will be kept under review. Across the county a greater focus normally will be paid to the higher priority categories.

Priority 4a-c issues will have their own processes to maximise outputs and make the most of available finance, staff, volunteer or community resources. This may result in them being worked on with greater urgency. Examples of when this might occur include:

- When the issue is part of the same path or close by a higher priority issue receiving attention
- When the issue is part of work being funded and delivered by the landowner, volunteer group, parish council or community group
- When the issue can benefit from external funding such as TOE2 or s106/CIL
- When action is linked to seasonal or cyclical issues – e.g. installing bridges outside of flood periods and arable cultivations, or cutting vegetation outside of bird nesting period
- When a likely rapid deterioration could be prevented by swift action
- When a sudden change of circumstances makes it possible to resolve a long standing problem, e.g. minor misalignment

Comment [PH6]: OCAF 6

September 2015

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 6

Date: 22nd September 2015
Title: Public Rights of Way and development – actions of the Countryside Access Team
Author: Dave Cavanagh, OCAF Member (walking and volunteer participation interest)

Introduction

The OCAF Member has asked a couple of questions that he feels are relevant to the work of OCAF and therefore warrant discussion and the views of the county council staff especially as the volume of planning applications seems to be increasing.

1. How do Countryside Access Team (CAT) officers seek to retain and protect the presence and character of PROW within/adjacent to a proposed building development area?
2. What do CAT officers do to ensure that their instructions are followed and how well developers adhere to those instructions – and what action is taken by council officers if developers do not follow instructions?

Background

The County Council's Countryside Access Team responds to planning applications and pre-application enquiries made to the local planning authority (LPA). For most developments this is the district council – that also sets conditions and obligations; whilst for roads, and mineral and waste applications Oxfordshire County Council is the planning authority. For major applications, generally more than ten dwellings, the CAT has to respond to applications through the county council's internal process – called 'Single Response' which gathers views from all OCC departments in one place adding the local lead officer and sometimes the local county councillors views.

Action

Two CAT documents are attached to this agenda item – the first is a short generic response document that is intended to be used when officer time is very short. Longer, more detailed and responses to a LPA will usually use this as the base, to which path specific comments and advice will be added. The second document is an extract from the adopted Rights of Way Management Plan which sets out the context for involvement with planning and also includes the standard conditions that the CAT try and encourage the LPA to impose.

OCAF Members are invited to consider and discuss the attached documents in the context of the questions asked by the OCAF member and any explanation/discussion that council officers give at the meeting. Members may wish to issue advice at the meeting or compile this after the meeting, or they may wish to use Huddle or other resources to explore what other LAFs and/or councils to work with the planning system to protect and improve public rights of way.

