

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (Local Access Forum)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Title

- 1.1. The Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum.

2. Reference Area

- 2.1. The County of Oxfordshire.

3. Status

- 3.1 The Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum ("The Forum") will be a statutory advisory body having no executive functions, administered by Oxfordshire County Council. Established under section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Statutory Instrument 2002 No 1836 The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002.

4. The Role of Oxfordshire County Council

- 4.1. Provide a Secretariat and other officer support to the Forum.
- 4.2. Prescribe a system of voting by which the Forum can take decisions.
- 4.3. Provide a venue for meetings with full and appropriate facilities.
- 4.4. Organise and advertise the Forum meetings.
- 4.5. Ensure that the Forum operates openly.
- 4.6. Establish a selection panel who will appoint members equitably according to selection criteria and the member's purpose and role.
- 4.7. Reimburse reasonable expenses incurred by members in attending meetings of the Forum and other approved activities, including travel, subsistence and dependent care, in the course of members undertaking their duties.
- 4.8. Reimburse the cost of places on organised training courses considered appropriate and necessary by the Chair and Vice-chair.
- 4.9. Publish an annual report on the Forum's activities.

5. Membership of the Forum

- 5.1 The Forum will consist of no fewer than 10 and no more than 22 members
- 5.2 Membership will be balanced to avoid dominance by any single interest group and encourage cross-sectional interests that will include a broad range of experience and interests in recreational use of the countryside, land management and other relevant interests (e.g. tourism, local transport, enterprise and economy, health, disabled people).
- 5.3 Members appointed will be those that appear to the appointing authority to be representative of the interests of a) users of local public rights of way and the new access land; b) owners and occupiers of countryside mapped as access land or land crossed by rights of way; c) any other interest especially relevant to Oxfordshire's countryside.
- 5.4 Forum members will be appointed by a selection panel who will assess if applicants have sufficient experience of countryside access issues within Oxfordshire to be able to make an informed and constructive contribution to improving access provision. This assessment will be based on the application form and selection criteria. The selection process will aim to ensure a reasonable balance between the number of members representing the interests in paragraph 5.3(a) above, and those representing the interests in 5.3(b). The Regulations contain no

provision for the appointment of 'independent' members

- 5.5 Members will act in the best interests of the people of Oxfordshire and not through individual interest agendas. Members of the Forum, once appointed, will be acting in an individual capacity rather than as a representative of a particular organisation.
- 5.6 Members who have a personal interest, whether direct or indirect, in any matter to be discussed by the Forum shall disclose the nature of the interest to the meeting. The regulations do not prohibit that member from participating in the discussion but it is necessary that the member's interest is made known to other members of the Forum and will normally be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 5.7 Members will be expected to confirm their support to the positive purpose of the Forum, commit to working within the Terms of Reference and through constructive working with other members.
- 5.8 Members must be willing to commit the necessary time to attend meetings, training etc. and be willing to actively contribute to produce outputs.
- 5.9 Members must be prepared to disseminate information, recommendations and advice to the Forum from the members of their own group, organisation or area of interest.
- 5.10 Members must be prepared, within reason, to work up ideas or actions outside of the confines of the Forum, reporting back as necessary.
- 5.11 Members will respond quickly and efficiently to reasonable requests for information from the Secretariat.
- 5.12 Members will be appointed, initially for one, two or three years, with the option of further period(s) of three years. This will ensure that the reappointment process does not occur at one time, thus maintaining momentum. The initial term of appointment will be allocated equitably between the interest groups by the selection panel. The Forum's membership and operation will be reviewed by the County Council after the first three years and afterwards to ensure that the Forum remains relevant to the needs of the area.
- 5.13 The Forum will have a Chair and Vice-chair appointed by nomination and election from amongst members at the first meeting of the Forum. The Chair and Vice-chair will each be elected for a period of one year. The Chair and Vice-chair should not be from the same interest group. When the term of office has expired or either post becomes vacant for any reason, both posts will put forward for re-election. Individual members may only be elected to either post for a maximum of three consecutive years.
- 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
- 5.15 Members will be expected to give one month's notice in writing to the appointing authority should he/she wish to resign from the Forum.

6. Role and Responsibilities of the Forum

- 6.1 **To give advice on the implementation, management and review of the statutory right of Open Access to the countryside by acting as a consultee for the Countryside Agency's mapping project in Oxfordshire by;**
 - 6.1.1 Providing advice to the County Council and the Countryside Agency;
 - 6.1.2 Commenting on the identification of Open Access land for mapping purposes.
- 6.2 **To assist Natural England or Forestry Commission (in woodland dedicated as access land) in respect of local restrictions on access to the countryside by;**
 - 6.2.1 Identifying relevant issues that need to be taken into account in deciding how best to

implement any advice received from English Nature and English Heritage, and in considering applications made on land management grounds, where consulted;

6.2.2 Helping to identify best practice for the management of access restrictions in Oxfordshire.

6.3 To provide advice to Oxfordshire County Council on the preparation of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan by

6.3.1 Assisting with the review of Oxfordshire's public rights of way network, including commenting on the extent to which it meets the present needs of the public;

6.3.2 Evaluating the likely future needs of users of public rights of way;

6.3.3 Evaluating the results of any public consultation on the draft plan and any particularly significant issues arising from it;

6.3.4 Commenting on action plans that follow from the review and assist with their implementation.

6.4 To give advice on the development and implementation of recreation and access strategies which;

6.4.1 Sets public rights of way and open access in a broad context, integrating provision for access, all forms of open-air recreation, transport, tourism, health and public information;

6.4.2 Ensures provision is made for all users, and reflects the needs of local people;

6.4.3 Addresses the coordinated use of resources to deliver integrated recreation and access provision and management.

6.5 The Forum will aim to:

6.5.1 Develop a constructive and inclusive approach to the improvement of recreational access to the Oxfordshire countryside;

6.5.2 Adopt inclusive and consistent approaches with neighbouring Access Forums;

6.5.3 Disseminate its advice to Members of the County Council and other bodies as appropriate;

6.5.4 Seek specialist technical advice when needed and appropriate;

6.5.5 Work as a cohesive team engaging in constructive debate, seeking consensus on all reports.

6.5.6 It should be the aim of the Forum to carry out its business by discussion and consensus without the need for frequent formal voting. However where this is not possible, each member of the Forum present at a meeting shall be entitled to exercise one vote. Voting on any issue shall be determined using the simple majority method by show of hands. In the event of an equality of votes the Chair shall have a second or casting vote.

7 Administration

7.1 The Forum is required to hold at least two meetings per year. It is anticipated that the frequency will be increased, particularly around the time of the mapping process. The frequency of the meetings can be reviewed by the Forum.

7.2 No meeting shall conduct business unless there are i) at least one half plus one of the membership present and ii) the Chair or Vice-chair is present.

7.3 Agendas will be agreed between the Chair, Vice-chair and the Secretary.

7.4 Members of the Forum may request items for inclusion in the agenda of any meeting provided that they inform the Secretariat no later than eight working days before the meeting.

Agendas and any relevant papers will be circulated to members no later than six working days before any meeting.

- 7.5 Meetings will be advertised in advance on the County Council's website and be accessible to the public.
- 7.6 Agendas, papers and minutes of the meeting will be available to the public on the County Council's website and office as specified in the regulations.
- 7.7 The meetings of the Forum and any sub-committees established will be open public meetings. However the Chair retains the power of exclusion to suppress or prevent disorderly conduct or other misbehaviour at a meeting.
- 7.8 Members of the public can speak during meetings provided that they have given two working days notice to the Secretary. This provision may be relaxed at the discretion of the Chair. Speaking will normally be limited to five minutes on item relating to the published agenda. The Chair may reduce this time limit because of the length of the agenda or the number of people wanting to speak.
- 7.9 An open question and answer session will be held at the end of each meeting, normally for fifteen minutes, where members of the public may ask direct questions on any subject related to the work of the Forum. The Chair may reduce or increase this time limit with regard to the number of people wanting to speak.
- 7.10 The Chair and Vice-chair will invite observers to the meeting when appropriate.
- 7.11 Observers will be able to contribute to the proceedings at the discretion of the Chair.

October 2002

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