

## OXFORDSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF 2020/21  
Wednesday 20 May 2020, Online Zoom® and email meeting

2020 (1)

### Attending: Members

Stuart McGinness (SMG) Chair	Mathew Judson (MJ) Vice Chair	Dave Cavanagh (DC)
Philip Chamberlain (PC)	Ilse Lambert (IL)	Cllr Yvonne Constance OBE (YC)
John Griffin (JG)	Sarah Martin (SM)	Anne Luttmann-Johnson (ALJ)

### Oxfordshire County Council Officers attending to support OCAF:

Paul Harris (PH) - OCAF Secretary/Principal Officer PRoW Access Strategy  
Hugh Potter (HP) - Group Manager Area Operations Hub

#### 1. Welcome

Secretary opened the meeting and welcomed participants on Zoom and email. Members were advised that agenda items would be emailed through to accompany the secretary's report

#### 2. Apologies and declarations

Apologies received from Gordon Garraway and Rachel Livingstone. No declarations

#### 3. Annual election-re-election of Chair and Vice- chair

Stuart and Mathew re-elected as Chair and Vice-chair. Members thanked them for renewing their commitment.

#### 4. Confirm minutes from meeting 47 – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Confirmed as correct

#### 5. Matters arising from meeting 47 (2019(2))

All matters included in Secretary's report. Extract below

*2019(2)(4) Action 1: see agenda item 7*

*2019(2)(4) All other actions completed and nothing to update*

*2019(2)(5) British Horse Society: Actions 5 and 6: PH produced equestrian topic paper for the emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, along with the Greenways topic paper. These were circulated to OCAF members separately. The LTCP engagement period has ended and PH will share any next steps with members after the analysis has been concluded.*

*2019(2)(8) Review of liaison groups: Action 7 completed and as there was not a meeting of Monitoring Group and due to the pressures of team vacancies and Covid19 no further work on this has been undertaken. If there are any developments they will be brought to a future meeting*

*2019(2)(9) Space for questions: Action 8 completed. Refer to Hugh Potter's update about Marcham Mill in agenda item 6*

#### 6. Public rights of way update

Secretary's report accompanied the agenda paper which gave a summary of Covid-19 impacts and work to date along with reports from each of the public rights of way discipline areas.

YC referenced the press release from the day before which was encouraging responsible use of the countryside. It could be seen as nannying but YC felt that some guidance was helpful and encouraged

people to follow the Countryside Code. SMG added that he had been advised by farmer to leave gates open. JG agreed with an appropriate level of guidance as a lot of people don't understand the rules and need helpful advice and notices. JG acknowledged there was some extra work involved for landowners but there was a balance to be struck. SM suggested that bike bells should be used more with such an increase in numbers as their use helped all users. YC felt this was a good idea as cyclists are silent and this can cause issues for more vulnerable pedestrians, especially in places like Oxford. YC also identified potential problems on land where livestock or racehorses are kept as they can escape if gates are left open.

PC stated that the message about the countryside being open could be interpreted differently. People seemed to think all grass margins were accessible and can become abusive if their non-accessibility is pointed out. He added that signage was normally a waste of time. PC was also worried about people forming habits of using all farmland in their locality instead of just lawful routes and areas. YC acknowledged this point and said emphasis would be put on using public routes and areas only. IL questioned the first point in the guidance about exercise and outdoors as this could be misinterpreted. She added that some farmers local to her had made comments questioning if people should be being out and about. DC said he sympathised with landowners and hoped that the latter would be tolerant of people out for exercise who don't know the rights of way rules and so don't think they are doing anything wrong – adding that most people don't read websites before heading out for a walk, run or bike. SMG added that some people exercising were worried that Covid-19 is fatal so are concerned about the proximity of others.

PH suggested that access providers may have to consider how they provide and promote access in the future. DC talked about his local area in Uffington where it was still easy to get lost. Most people don't carry maps and there were many paths without waymarks. He said it was better for waymarks at every junction and change of direction so that maps weren't relied on. PH suggested this could be something for Parish Path Wardens to take action on. HP added that anyone can pick up waymarking improvement work as this was simple, very beneficial for path users and it increased the chances of people sticking to paths. He acknowledged things can always be improved.

Hugh took questions about his team's update paper. DC asked about the tasks team posts and how they fitted in. HP explained that with Matt Ball leaving full time work it creates an opportunity to review and renew public rights of way maintenance. The job role has changed with the creation of the delivery team leader role. He reported that there was a very strong field of candidates and they were close to making an appointment. They were lucky to still have Matt around to be able to induct and assist the new person.

DC asked how many boots were actually on the ground maintaining public rights of way. HP replied that at the moment there was only Matt as staff member plus some contractors as other circumstances meant that other tasks team members had left. The team structure, machinery and contractors were all in place and the new person would be working with Hugh to rebuild the team. Senior management are supportive of a 4-6 person team to be re-established. DC questioned footbridge installation and HP replied that this was done under contract by Skanska which has always fabricated the smaller kit bridges as well.

## **7. Parish 'how to' guide**

PH introduced the agenda item and thank those members who had helped to get it to this stage and invited comments.

DC said that links to the guide should be inserted wherever appropriate i.e. more than once, on the OCC Countryside Access webpages, to increase the chance that parish councillors will find them again in the future. JG thanked the working group for the work which was a great job and he hoped it would be sent to all parish clerks. He requested that links could also point to Chilterns and other path volunteers. ALJ added that it was a great document and that parish and village websites could be a good place to increase awareness. HP endorsed links to the Oxfordshire Together coordinating team as they already have networks of contacts and would include this.

PC asked about overhanging trees and reported that insurers were getting increasingly twitchy. He asked whether temporary closures were possible without causing local uproar. He had asked people to take care when tree works were in progress. YC advised that temporary traffic orders could be used and HP confirmed they could be used on paths as well as roads, but he explained that in rural areas people still walked through closed paths as there was often a way round. There was also a cost and time delay attached to each order but using the order approach protected the interests of everyone.

Members endorsed the document and PH invited additional comments to be sent through to him.

### **8. Any other business**

IL asked if byways around Wantage could have surface improvements as even horses damaged the surface. YC said that she had been fighting for 6 years to keep paths useable and has to find a way to keep the routes safe for non-motorised users. For repairs the critical issues was safety for these types of user.

SMG asked if we OCC can send out the landowner letters re ploughing and cropping as it would be nice to remind them of their obligations. HP said he agreed and had raised this with the access team. It tended to be more effective when certain landowners were targeted instead of a blanket approach. HP acknowledged that with lockdown access and logistics for farmers were challenging but crops were growing quickly, and action was needed. PC said that as a regular recipient of the previous reminder letters he didn't feel yearly reminders were necessary as those that read them do it anyway and those that don't reinstate don't bother reading the letter. He felt it was better to target repeat offenders. HP confirmed that this was the approach generally taken by officers.

### **9. Next meeting**

A short discussion about a possible meeting in September or October, but members settled on the regular November meeting and if there was enough business to arrange an additional meeting.

Next meeting **Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November**, online Zoom® meeting

Chair ended the meeting and thank members and staff for contributions

Meeting ended 11.05

Signed as correct by Chair of OCAF on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020