

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF 2024/25
Tuesday 21 May 2024, Upper Heyford Heritage Centre

2024 (1)

Attending:

Members

Mathew Judson (Chair)	Philip Chamberlain (PC)	Anne Luttmann-Johnson (ALJ)
Richard Fairhurst (RF)	Rachel Livingstone (RL)	John Griffin (JG)

Oxfordshire County Council Officers attending to support OCAF

Paul Harris (PH) - OCAF Secretary/Team Leader Public Rights of Way Access Strategy
Rebecca McNaught (RM) – Countryside Access Development Officer

Observers

Becky Crockett (BC) Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

Welcome and introductions. Chair and Secretary opened the meeting and welcomed existing members, officer and observers. Members also briefly reminded the group who they represented. Chair noted that it was good to have a meeting in person.

1. Election/Re-election of Chair & Vice Chair for 2024

PC proposed Matthew Judson to be re-elected as Chair. This was seconded by JG. Richard Fairhurst volunteered to take on the role of Vice Chair. This was proposed by JG and seconded by ALJ. All in agreement and both were thanked by the group. No Declarations of Interest

2. Apologies had been received from Dave Cavanagh, Ilse Lambert, Hugh Potter & Cllr Dr Pete Sudbury

A discussion was had about how we get more people engaged with OCAF especially landowners/agents or managers – although it was pointed out that farmers were busy and weather dependent and farms also can suffer from increasing public access with little appreciation for the issues public can create. The increasing age of farmers was also highlighted. PH suggested the original large membership was probably because two big projects for OCAF to work on – the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and open access land. RF asked if a representative of the bigger landowners could be approached as bigger estates could yield better wins. He offered to see if Blenheim Estate would be interested to attend OCAF. On a suggestion by JG, MJ offered to draft an advert for new members and send to Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC)

Action 1: RF - to engage with Blenheim Estate to see if they were interested in attending OCAF

Action 2: MJ - to prepare and circulate an advert for members and circulate to OALC

3. Minutes of 15th November 2023 were confirmed.

4. Matters Arising

2023(1) Action 1 – PH to follow up the accessibility consideration with HS2. PH reported that this had been actioned. Action closed

2023(1) Action 2 – PH to look at getting Other Routes with Public Access (ORPAs) on the online map. PH reported (included post meeting update) Ordnance Survey had been asked if a separate file existed for these and got a negative answer. This meant no progress could be made for this until research and Modification Order work had been completed for each route. Instead people should use the Ordnance Survey explorer Maps – online and paper versions. Action closed.

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2023(2) Action 3 – PH to consider how to engage with local council, and other unrepresented interests regarding recruitment to OCAF. This had been discussed under item 2 on the agenda and this would be kept under review. Action closed.

2023(2) Action 4 – PH will send OCAF members an example of standard planning wording that Access Strategy use as the basis for responding to planning applications. This was later shown on-screen with the information available at [What local communities can do to improve access | Oxfordshire County Council](#). Action closed.

5. One-minute updates from members about any significant issues from their interest areas

MJ – suggested it would be useful if OCC could communicate issues and actions better and gave the example of West Hagbourne Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) where he reported no advance discussion with user and amenity groups.

RF – reported that Sustrans are slowly reviewing the National Cycle Network (NCN) where there is a general move to get it off roads and onto public rights of way – there is a lack of funding but the ambition is there. He also mentioned OCCs Strategic Active Travel Network (SATN) which maps routes between towns – been signed off by OCC but it is a plan only, no money, but hopeful it will result in some improvements. RF also had been working on a spin off from Slow Ways project called Make Ways (makeways.org). More information available at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/Cambridgeshire-Active-Travel-Design-Guide-March-2023.pdf#page12>. RL highlighted the problem of asphalted bridleways which can be hazardous for horses.

JG reported that lots of people use the countryside and PRow network in groups and these should be included in discussions.

PC – reiterated need for getting landowners/farmers on OCAF and listed some of the issues landowners have with access including dogs and professional dog walks and off-lead access affecting crops and livestock, trespass and the lack of incentive for providing additional access routes, parking in gateways and fly tipping. He also referenced SATN where the project team had not engage with farmers and landowners where they had indicated routes which was unlikely to bring them onboard with the scheme. MJ asked communication can be improved. PH admitted OCC have not increased communications but can share others eg. Hampshire CC [Staying safe around horses and other livestock in the countryside \(youtube.com\)](#). Later on PC suggested there should be some sort of diversion exchange mechanism whereby new routes and upgrades on one route could help remove or divert an unwanted or problem path from a landholding.

RL – asked if anyone knew anything about ‘wellbeing roads’ – she stated they would not be closed but vehicles would have lower priority than walkers, horse riders and cyclists. PH said he only knew of ‘Quiet Lanes’. RF said there had been some assessments of Quiet Lanes and there’s no enforcement and abuse of the routes can crop up. Useful links are [What is Vision Zero? | Vision Zero Network](#) [Quiet Lanes Suffolk | What is a Quiet Lane?](#)

6. Access Strategy Update

PH gave a presentation on recent work from the Access Strategy team, in particular focusing on an update for the restructure, the developer-funding PRow improvement programme, and thinking about the THIRD Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP3).

- Restructure key points: New Environment & Heritage Group Manager starts 28th May (Dave Keeley), the new Landscape & Natural Capital team leader in post (Beccy Micklem) recruiting replacement. We are expecting the new Lower Windrush and Oxon Greenspace Project Manager to be in place in the autumn....and OCC’s leadership team has initiated new restructure [*post meeting update, we now have a new Director for Environment and Highways – Paul Farmer*]

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- Delivery and planning of developer funded (s106) access schemes & continue preparations for increase in spending Key points: The programme meets six out of nine OCC Strategic Priorities, from increasing access to greenspace to climate change to working with partners to benefit Oxfordshire. The programme seeks to achieve the following:
 - i. Negotiating, securing and justifying every s106 ask from relevant developments
 - ii. Connecting new communities to their countryside and natural spaces – across private land owned by others
 - iii. Enabling easier access for more people, more of the time – to a network that should be FREE to use 24hrs a day/7days a week/365 days a year
 - iv. Upgrades to user types (e.g. enabling cycling and horseriding on what were footpaths)
 - v. Creating new multi-user routes – thinking low agility people
 - vi. Improvements to surfacing and infrastructure (gates, bridges, signing, seating, planting etc) for more accessibility
 - vii. Where possible - resolve existing network issues

Benefits and challenges to the programme were listed as well as a summary map of spend ambitions over the next 5 years.

- For RoWIP3 PH said that he was thinking about developing the following approach in the next few months before moving onto drafting stage in 2025 after elections had settled down and decisions made regarding the production and engagement approaches.
 - i. RoWIP 1 & 2 - what's gone well and not so well
 - ii. Staff engagement – views and aspirations
 - iii. Stakeholder engagement – internal/external
 - iv. Elections – getting the lie of the land
 - v. Network analysis since RoWIP2
 - vi. Gap assessment e.g. greenways, biodiversity, lockdowns, e-bikes, health & wellbeing
 - vii. Data gathering – e.g. Greenspace PRoWs
- PH left OCAF with the following questions to consider for future meetings and offline work:
 - i. Any views on RoWIP3 summary?
 - ii. How can OCAF help OCC?
 - a. Read OCC's RoWIP and comment on good, not so good and missing?
 - b. Read other RoWIPs – what works well?
 - iii. How can we get more interest areas on OCAF?

Action 3: All OCAF members: to consider the questions and issues raised at the meeting and read other RoWIPs, think about their interest areas and think about what this could mean for the third RoWIP

7. Heyford Park Developer Funded Access Improvement Scheme

RM explained the situation at Heyford Park highlighting the success of opening up one of the bridleways that was stopped up when the runway was built, but also stressing the need for continued support from colleagues to get the other bridleway re-opened with a surfaced link on existing public footpath to create a circular route which will then also form part of the Heritage Trail being set up by the site owner, Dorchester Living and the site's Heritage Centre.

Further discussions were held about this on the site visit walk which looked at the newly created section of bridleway, surfacing (which is the specification of a number of other s106 funded improvement projects) and the historical importance of the site.

8. Forward work planning, next meeting dates and agendas

The next OCAF meeting in November was discussed. It was agreed that in-person meeting is preferable, and Tuesdays also seemed to work better for some people. Depending on workloads

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and other issues the next meeting may include early OCAF work on RoWIP3. If that is the case PH will send out more details ahead of the meeting – but this is likely to need working groups to be established outside of formal meetings.

ACTION 4 – RMc to *'Doodle Poll'* a date and organise.

- 9. Notices, questions and other issues** – Chair highlighted the problem on byways where 4x4 use had kept vegetation down which stopped being a benefit when 4x4 access was restricted.

Chair ended the meeting and thanked all for participating.