

Local Access Forum – Meeting held on Wednesday, 22nd May, 2013 at the Meeting Room 1, Chalvey Community Centre, The Green, Chalvey, Slough, SL1 2SP

Present:-

LAF Members

David Munkley, Local Access Forum (Chair)
Ian Houghton, Local Access Forum (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Satpal S Parmar
Toby Evans
Tony Haines
Councillor Wayne Strutton

Observers

Neil Landricombe, The Environment Agency (Observer)
Russell Robson, The Environment Agency (Observer)
Donna Ryan, The Environment Agency (Observer)

Officers, Slough Borough Council

Jacqui Wheeler
Rights of Way Officer
Alex Deans
Head of Highways Engineering

113. Apologies & Welcome

Trevor Allen
Ken Wright

114. Declarations of Interest

No declarations.

115. Minutes of the last meeting held on 21st January 2013

The minutes of the last meeting held on 21st January 2013 were approved as a correct record with the minor amendment to add Wayne Strutton onto the attended list.

116. Matters Arising (other than those on the agenda)

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Ditton Park Cycle Path update –

JW tabled the report updating members on recent positive developments. She explained that Peter Challis (Sustrans), Anthony Hurst (RBWM PRoW) and Jacqui Wheeler (SBC PRoW) had met with Lisa Gilbert, newly appointed Facilities Co-ordinator for CA Technologies and Jim Barry VP of Facilities for CA Technologies. Issues discussed are detailed in the report contained with the LAF papers. Briefly though; CA has agreed to draw up a draft action plan including a scope of works for repairs/maintenance of the path over a rolling period. The worst areas identified as the flooding path towards Majors Farm Road and the path across North field would be prioritised. CA also agreed to alter the signage on the gates to show summer opening times to come in line with public expectations and comply with the planning agreement.

AD made it clear that it is CA's obligation to provide a path which is suitable for walkers and cyclists not a choice. WS mentioned that CA has a pro-environment policy which could mean they may be reluctant about putting in a sealed path surface as requested by Sustrans, Peter Challis. A sealed surface would mean greater initial outlay with a lower long term maintenance cost than an unsealed surface. However all agreed that surface type was an issue for CA to decide, as long as it resulted in an effective repair of the path.

CA agreed they would give the 21 days' notice required in the event of a planned closure by emailing PC, AH and JW and as much notice as possible for an emergency closure.

AD thought it needs to be made clear that CA has signed up to the S106 and that their obligations are clear under that agreement. They need to put a maintenance regime in place to ensure the path doesn't deteriorate after repairs are made.

DM thought it unwise for the LAF's to relax the pressure until the action plan has been seen and all agreed that a timescale for the works must be provided. All in all good progress has been made in building a positive relationship with CA in the light of previous setbacks.

Resolved – JW would continue liaising with AH and PC on this issue and would circulate the draft action plan as soon as it's provided by CA Technologies.

Update on Multi-user Route Trial along the Jubilee River -

Originating with the RBWM LAF, JW tabled the finalised route and signage that would be placed along the route. The small section in Slough runs along the Jubilee River from Wood Lane to the Slough Road. The trial would run from May 2103 to May 2014 and be reviewed at the end of that time.

RR confirmed there had been a press release and the signage is up along the route with the EA having consented to a couple of mounting blocks to aid horse riders.

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Members queried the width of the path, which is 3 metres of surfaced path with grass verges in most places.

JW mentioned that SBC has recently surfaced the main cycleway along the Jubilee River, part of which will be used for this trial, so it will be interesting to monitor what effect the horse riding use will have. A discussion followed about conflicts between different types of users and considerate behaviour that is expected eg; cyclists using a warning bell.

Resolved – to keep this issue on the agenda for updates.

Chalvey Road West –request from LAF to relocate disabled parking bay –

JW confirmed this issue has been forwarded to the relevant officer in the Parking team and is awaiting a response.

117. Gating - Updates

Kendal Close –

It is still intended to ask Housing to dedicate this route as a public right of way leading through to the towpath and the Slough Basin, however there are various works required to bring the path into a fit state for the public to use. It's been decided to wait for Housing to do these works before dedication. JW showed members the artwork design for the mural to be located on the wall opposite the path across a green space owned by Housing. Reactions were varied. JW explained that no objections had been received to the bright vibrant design, but that the other mural intended to be along the path would be more muted.

TH hoped that a future planning gain for the basin development would include improvements to this link path.

Prescott Road –

JW explained that this Gating Order consultation was required solely to deal with the continual fly tipping along a private road in an industrial area. Members were informed that pedestrians and cyclists would have unrestricted access. The question of what kind of gate is intended was raised; JW would investigate and inform members.

Members' consensus was that there were no objections to this Gating Order provided that access for pedestrians including wheelchair users was maintained.

Rossiter Close –

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JW informed the meeting that the Council had decided not to make a Gating Order for this alleyway at the current time. Monitoring of the situation would continue though and if there is any change in the situation, the decision would be revisited.

Members welcomed the news that no Gating Order would be made.

118. Jubilee River - Environment Agency

Introduction – What is the Jubilee River? – Donna Ryan

Donna Ryan is based in the Environment Agency office at Farnham, though the Jubilee River is her usual patch. Donna explained that the Jubilee River is a flood alleviation scheme protecting 3000 homes from flooding running between Maidenhead and Windsor. It was officially opened in 2002. There is a control structure in Taplow allowing regulation of the amount of water directed along the channel. It has been operated over 10 times since it was opened preventing flooding of an estimated 1000 homes. Essentially, the channel is successfully doing its job.

Designed as a natural channel, the River incorporates wetlands and channels providing natural wildlife habitat. The EA are responsible for the all the landscape maintenance along the channel, car parks and picnic benches, board walks, as well as operational and safety infrastructure including; fencing and gates.

Enhancements – Russell Robson

As an operational structure the Jubilee River is complete, and maturing into what is largely a country park.

Land that was CPO'd for the scheme has reverted back to its riparian ownership. Leases have been taken out by EA to maintain car parks. The River travels through 3 LA areas with the majority in private ownership. The middle of the channel marks the land ownership boundary (riparian). Public access is via PRow and the River itself. The water that flows down the River comes from the Thames and so the public right of navigation extends to the Jubilee River and therefore can be used 24 hours a day 365 days a year unhindered. It was always recognised that unpowered craft would use the River. There are portage points for canoes at the weirs, not fishing platforms as they are often viewed by anglers. This is a conflict area between anglers and canoeists that may require signage.

Canoe England and British Rowing have been looking at canoe/rowing access to the Jubilee River in the last 2 years, particularly on the reach nearest and parallel to the M4. This is a straight section of the River ideal for rowing. The EA have helped Slough Indoor Rowing Club in conjunction with

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London Youth Rowing access the River with several events having taken place on the reach just south of Chalvey.

As a result of this work there are proposals to develop a water sports centre adjacent to the Slough Road car park. A project is being developed and a site has been identified which is outside the one in 100 year flood. Land is owned by Eton College who have agreed a negligible rent.

Canoeing downstream of the weir with rowing upstream on the straight section up to the next weir. This is an opportunity to get the large amount of indoor rowing in Slough out onto the water in a safe, local environment which is not the traditional rowing club where there can be barriers to participation. The centre, constructed from shipping containers would have a 17 year shelf life and is viewed as being a legacy project from the 2012 Olympics.

There are already discussions with local academies to become lessees and a grant has been applied for. The whole River is being promoted as a canoe trail by Canoe England with online maps and trails. It's been identified that you can canoe all the way down from Taplow to the Slough Road and beyond. RR explained that together the Jubilee River and the Thames can provide the only circular canoe route in England giving the Jubilee great potential as a tourist destination.

Overall, use of the Jubilee River is definitely on the increase with disabled groups canoeing, scout and guide groups, open water swimming which is becoming popular and angling, despite the fluctuating fish population.

Out of the water the Trial of the multi-use route linking with the Thames Path and other public rights of way has been agreed. It is hoped this may lead to increasing horse riding provision up towards Taplow.

The EA will work with any organisations that approach them to look at opportunities to increase access to the River. A board system (red – powered craft and yellow – unpowered craft) tells people when the River is in high flow located at the weirs and on the website.

Organisation -

In answer to a query from TH, RR explained that a review of the effectiveness of government quangos is currently taking place, which includes the EA and Natural England. It is expected that decisions as to the waterways will be discussed as part of this review. Rivers including the Thames and the Jubilee differ from canals as they are in private ownership. The only bits of river infrastructure owned by the EA are the weirs and locks.

The Thames path and other pathways along the Rivers are the responsibility of the landowner and through enforcement of the individual highway authority. DR clarified that the Dorney Wetlands is one of the only sections retained by the EA.

Links to surrounding communities -

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Members were interested to hear that under the review of National Trails there is likely to be additional funding to develop links from the Thames path (est. 1972) to surrounding communities. TH mentioned that the River Thames Alliance were intent on making sure the benefits of the Thames went to the widest community possible and he felt that Slough would be one of the hardest to reach communities to be targeted. RR confirmed the EA aim to encourage use of the Jubilee River from local communities like Slough, by increasing and improving access and making the River as welcoming as possible.

DM asked how the public access is protected for future generations while DR confirmed that agreements are in place to ensure access is maintained in perpetuity with all routes being public rights of way.

Car Parks –

RR explained the smaller size of the car parks was planned to discourage the Jubilee River being used as a 'drive to' destination and to encourage people to access it by walking/cycling.

The Slough Road car park is the only one of the four to receive any anti-social behaviour, though it is low level considering its proximity to the urban environment. DM asked if there were any plans to increase or enlarge the car parks explaining that for many people this is the only way to visit, however, RR stated that the EA would rather improve walking and cycling links to the Jubilee River.

Promotion -

JW felt that people were unaware how close the Jubilee River is to walk to and that it is such a unique environment. RR agreed, suggesting that awareness could be raised by getting local people to the River for specific reasons eg; rowing or fishing after which they would more than likely return to enjoy the area for other reasons while also spreading the word.

All agreed that better signage is paramount both for car parks and for strategic locations within Slough indicating how far to walk to the River in minutes. Some kind of indication as to what to expect on arrival would also be useful.

A discussion followed about improving the main links to the Jubilee River and alternative car parking such as the Herschel Park car park off Datchet Road. All agreed it would be beneficial to work in partnership with the EA in terms of improving access to and promotion of the Jubilee River for Slough residents in particular. RR suggested that the previous EA guide produced for public access in 2003 could be updated in partnership with Slough and RBWM council's. There seems to be a definite need for more promotional literature and online information about the River and its country park feel. RR also mentioned the potential for cultural events to be held in the open spaces around dorney wetlands including water born festivities.

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DM noted the difficulty in there being no toilet facilities along the River. RR stated they were aware of this issue and that it may be incorporated within future development of facilities at Taplow and Slough Road.

Fishing –

WS enquired as to locations of public fishing rights, as he knows a local disabled group who would like to participate. The EA promised to provide this information. RR stated that once the proposed Water Sports Centre is established there are plans to develop it further as an educational destination to encompass canoeing, rowing, and angling and pond dipping. JW thought this would interest local schools.

TH mentioned there is a lot of interest and people championing a link from the canal through to the Thames via the Jubilee River. RR was aware of it and JW agreed to forward contact details of the master's student currently working on this project.

Resolved - All considered the Jubilee River to be a fantastic local resource agreeing LAF support for its continued development and the partnership working required to promote to local residents through the internet and paper guides. DM thanked the EA for their presentation and invited them back at some point to give updates.

119. Slough Arm of the Grand Union Canal - Tony Haines

JW tabled the report showing the current state of the towpath on the Slough Arm; works that have been completed and day to day issues like dog fouling and litter accumulation under the Wexham Road bridge. TE queried whether there were any dog bins with WS stating that dog fouling bins are to be changed across the borough to normal multi-functional bins. JW also tabled the Bracknell dog leaflet asking if members thought that Slough ought to have something similar. WS thought that SBC should issue pcn's for dog fouling. Members agreed that the leaflet would be beneficial and recommended SBC produce a similar dog behaviour leaflet that can also be laminated for various locations along the canal.

The Canal – presentation by Tony Haines

The heritage that the Canal represents is significant being constructed in 1882 *after* the railways. It was part of the London waterways network connecting Slough to London and further afield to Birmingham. Bucks CC were still using it in the early seventies to transport road materials.

The canal stops at the basin as Eton College and other landowners didn't want it on their land. After the war canals were falling into disrepair nationally however enthusiasts fought to save the canal system and in the sixties the emphasis for canals changed to leisure use. Slough Council joined up with Groundwork and the Colne Valley Park in 1987 and with new opportunities for

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funding; the towpath was reinstated in the early 1990's. TH explained that the canal towpath is situated within the Colne Valley Park and that SBC had withdrawn its support from the Colne Valley Park. He felt this ought to be revived as well. JW would bring information to the next meeting about the CVP. Under the guise of Groundwork, the slough canal festival began and was used to promote the leisure activities and help encourage people to value the canal.

New developments in Uxbridge have brought improvements to the canal. TH felt that the efforts over the last 20 years to promote the canal must be continued and revitalised. As a wildlife corridor it is exceptional.

The Slough Canal Festival initially concentrated on promoting wildlife, fishing, canoeing, walking and cycling activities along the canal. However, in later years the festival became more of a community event. Pressure groups involved are the Inland Waterways Association and the Friends of Slough Canal which began to promote the ideals of the festival.

British Waterways is a nationalised company which wasn't sold off due to fear of public backlash. It changed into the Canals and Rivers Trust last year, with a charity status with the emphasis on protection of the canal network.

Slough's Local Development Framework clearly states the canal basin area should be developed "in a comprehensive way which maximises the attractiveness of the canal and the basin". So that any development plans should open up views to the basin, attract visitors; enhance pedestrian and cycle access and nature conservation.

Currently, a new developer is needed to put forward a scheme for the development at the canal basin. There is a problem however, in that Travis Perkins who occupies part of the land at the basin has no plans to move. DM asked whether Travis Perkins is on a lease and if they could be persuaded to move by CRT. TH believed that CRT is not keen on putting pressure on Travis Perkins at this time.

CRT own a 5m strip on the north side of the canal where the Icara School is located. There is potential for this area to have visitor moorings or an educational boat. Attracting more boat usage of the canal would positively affect the upkeep of the canal corridor.

There is a planning application for a marina off the north side of the canal just to the east of Rochford Gardens. The EA are providing pre-application advice. JW will find out what stage the application has reached.

CRT was planning to spend £700,000 on dredging the canal this year, however, the plans have been scuppered unfortunately due to the following problems. One is subsidence on the north side near the Ridgeway Industrial Estate near Uxbridge, with money spent to strengthen the banks. The other being the collapse of Bridge 2a just east of the M25 where 18 inch cracks had appeared in the structure. The towpath has been closed with an alternative

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route signed. This is a major problem which is expected to be repaired in the next two months with the canal closed in the meantime.

In terms of how the vision for the canal can be supported, all agreed that the LAF need to engage with the Friends of Slough Canal. DM suggested the possibility of a joint meeting of the LAF and the Friends. JW would look into this and liaise with TH and DM.

The consensus was that the LAF ought to lobby for a revival of the partnership working on the canal which included the LA's; Slough, Bucks County, South Bucks District and Hillingdon. JW would make the other authorities and Bucks LAF aware of what's being done by SBC in terms of improvements, while members wholeheartedly supported the on-going surfacing works.

Resolved – LAF agreed that actions should be taken according to the above minutes with the membership firmly committed to supporting the Slough Arm of the Canal.

120. Transport / LSTF Schemes/Designs - Updates

JW tabled the report showing updates on all the Transport and LSTF schemes.

Pavement Parking Policy – the safety audits have recently been received and are being considered with a re-design if necessary. AD informed that the Council are trying to negotiate a reduced level of signage with the DfT.

Heart of Slough – TH mentioned a new scheme in London whereby cyclists are directed onto their own separate roundabouts on the corners of what is a 4 way junctions for cars. All agreed this new design idea ought to be investigated and brought to the attention of the Slough Transport team. AD again stated that cyclists who choose to cycle on carriageway need to do their own risk assessment, as the design provides for cyclists to be off carriageway.

TE emphasised the need for extra signage for on carriageway cycling southbound to the main junction as the cyclist is left with nowhere to go. Members felt that the scheme as a whole improved access and safety for pedestrians and buses but the cyclist hadn't been given enough consideration. Members felt there must be opportunities to improve the scheme for cyclists.

Chalvey FP33 – Primary Way – all improvements are now complete.

Chalvey Road scheme – JW confirmed it is SBC policy to use green cycle lanes in Slough. Members understood that green tarmac would be rolled out across Slough where cycle lanes cross junctions as soon as it has been trialled in Chalvey. IH wanted assurance that the council would maintain the green surfacing in future. DM reiterated the cost implications and inflexibility

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of having to replace green tarmac. AD concurred stating that white lines applied more frequently would make cycle lanes stand out more than the less well maintained green.

Better Bus Farnham Road – TH queried the figures for potential increase in congestion acquired from modelling of the scheme that could justify the improvements to bus times. All expressed concern over the potential congestion that may be caused and hoped the modelling figures were correct. JW would ask Transport for the figures.

Lansdowne Ave Experimental Closure – JW confirmed plans would be forwarded when available and the scheme would go ahead in the next month for a period of six months after which there will be a consultation of residents and the LAF to help decide on its permanency.

New scheme – A4 Ledgers Road to High Street – AD presented members with a new scheme for a shared use footway on the southern side of the A4. It is felt that the scheme is the best that can be achieved within the existing physical constraints of the footway on this stretch. Problems include; the narrow footbridge over the railway; severe cross fall levels, narrow footway and the bus stop outside the Gala. The bus shelter has already been moved with the double benefit of improving bus times and increasing footway width to 4m. IH suggested a slight build out where the cycle lane joins the carriageway at the Ledgers Road junction would benefit cyclists' safety. If carriageway width allowed AD thought this could be incorporated. JW would ensure this comment was forwarded to Transport.

Resolved - LAF members to forward any comments on council feedback and the new A4 Ledgers Rd to High St shared use footway scheme to JW. JW would also forward on more details about the Lansdowne Ave scheme. Item to remain on agenda for updates/new schemes.

121. Regional and National News

This item was abandoned due to lack of time with updates to be circulated to members between meetings.

122. Any Other Business

None

123. Date of the next Meeting

6pm on Thursday 26th September 2013. Venue to be advised.

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.45 pm)

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