

BRADFORD LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Notes of meeting: 28th March 2023

Present: Pam Allen (Chair), Cllr Alex Ross-Shaw, Emma Young, Diddy Metcalf,
Jane Callaghan, Danny Jackson

Apologies: David Sturge, Tim Sellors, Nick Dybeck, Goodith White, Chris Moore, Mark Corrigan

It was noted that Chris Moore who represented Ramblers Association until recently, had formally resigned from the LAF. Chris was one of the original members of the LAF and a note of thanks will be sent to him for his long service.

It was also noted that Jane Callaghan is to step down from Wilsden Parish Council at the upcoming elections and will no longer represent WPC on the LAF. She is hopeful that a replacement representative will be appointed. Thanks to Jane for her input.

Thanks and good wishes also to Tim Brooks, who left Bradford Council in January. His replacement is currently being recruited.

1) Matters arising from previous meeting:

- a) A short discussion took place about membership of the Forum, attendance and retention. Current members will be asked to re-commit and then further recruitment can be considered. A range of possible ways to attract members were discussed.
- b) Accessible network: DJ confirmed that the approach to achieving as accessible a network as possible was largely based on the “gaps, gates and stiles” hierarchy – where the least restrictive option is sought wherever possible (ie. a gap or no furniture in preference to a gate or stile). It was accepted however that this is not always possible and that often such solutions need to reflect local circumstances on a case by case basis. For example, there is pressure in some parts of the District for the installation of barriers (A frames etc) to prevent anti-social access by motorbikes and quad bikes. These can have equalities impacts and so careful consideration is required.
- c) Tree planting schemes which may impact on access and rights of way were raised. It was felt that, by and large, schemes implemented by the Council’s Woodlands team or through the White Rose Forest partnership, went through fairly rigorous constraint-checks so that access rights, habitats etc were not adversely affected. Less certain were the DEFRA/Forestry Commission funded planting schemes on private land. If such schemes did affect use of public rights of way, this can be followed up, but the Council is not informed in advance on such schemes. DJ offered to see if details of such schemes are available anywhere for circulation to the LAF.

2) Update from Yorkshire and the Humber Regional LAF

DM updated the LAF on the latest regional meeting (papers circulated with the agenda):

- A presentation from the National Farmers Union (NFU) outlined the difficulties facing the farming industry, particularly tenant farmers, with funding support reducing for food production, energy and feed prices increasing. There is a move towards environmental gains (eg. biodiversity, carbon neutrality) generally, which may later the pattern of agriculture – eg, cattle out in fields for longer.
- De-Regulation update – it was confirmed that the Government had changed their position on the abolition of the 2026 cut-off date for historical Definitive Map Modification Order claims and would now re-impose the cut-off date at 2031. This will inevitably place further pressure on under-resourced Order Making Authorities, already with long backlogs of applications.

This prompted a discussion about the backlog of DMMO's in Bradford – DJ clarified that the register of applications was available publicly here:

<https://www.bradford.gov.uk/environment/countryside-and-rights-of-way/definitive-map-applications/>

DJ also raised concerns about other proposals in the De-Regulation Act which would give landowners a “right to apply” for a direction on Public Path Order applications (diversions etc). PPO's are currently a power, not a duty on local authorities and so this gives some flexibility as to how they are managed. In Bradford, priority is given to PPO applications that have strategic value or will support the Councils overall regeneration ambitions (by accommodating development for example). The new regulations allow for a direction from the Secretary of State if a PPO applicant seeks one. This would require the order making authority to reach a decision on the PPO within a set timescale – thus adding more pressure to Rights of Way teams. Current experience of dealings with Planning Inspectorate when they are considering issuing a direction is that their default position is to issue the direction rather than take notice of Council's priorities.

3) Dog walking:

A long-standing item for the LAF was the desire for control of commercial dog walking businesses which are using Council sites to operate.

DJ reported discussions with East Lothian Council (paper circulated with the agenda) who have set up a registration scheme which seem to be widely regarded as good practice. The details are in the paper circulated prior to the meeting.

The general approach was broadly acceptable and the next steps would be:

- Public consultation on such a proposal (probably via Council's Current Consultations webpage)
- Further refinement of the scheme and how it relates to use of sites – red/amber/green categories

- Need to identify an administering/managing service, with the fees set at a level which would allow for self-financing
- Need for meaningful enforcement
- Proposal to liaise with neighbouring local authorities to see what their approaches are and whether there is an appetite for a more regional solution

4) Cattle and PROW's:

Recent incidents with cattle injuring or in some cases, killing, walkers prompted a discussion on livestock and rights of way.

DJ outlined the Council's approach- which was to contact landowners if reports of incidents were received –thankfully these are not common. Farmers need to be aware of the regulations regarding breeds of cattle and public rights of way. NFU and Health and Safety Executive have produced guidance leaflets, which can be sent out to farmers. Most incidents tend to involve people walking dogs in fields where calves are present – which can unsettle cows so they become protective.

“Poaching” of the path surface by livestock can be an issue, where the path surface is churned up and becomes muddy – so that users have to divert around it. This can be followed up and treated as an obstruction – so the Council's powers can come into effect in those circumstances.

5) Active Travel

EY reported that submissions had been made to the Active Travel Fund round 4, which include a number of multi-user routes. A reply had been received but it was currently being assessed and so no detail was cleared for publication yet. Members would need to be briefed and so publication may have to wait until after the May Elections. A separate update can be sent out before the next meeting.

6) CROW Activity update:

A report was circulated with the meeting agenda outlining some of the work undertaken by the Countryside and Rights of Way team since the last meeting.

Next meeting: Wednesday July 12th was proposed. Possibly to be held on-site. Suggestions welcome.