



Kent countryside access forum

KCAF Meeting

Meeting Date: **Monday 12 June 2023**

Meeting Time: **2:00pm to 4:00pm**

Meeting Venue: **Natural England Offices, Ashford.**

Attendees:

Jeremy Boxall	JBox	Chair
Anne Beecham	AB	(Vice chair) Tourism Representative
Richard Dickenson	RD	(Vice Chair) Vehicular User Representative
Robert Peel	RP	Walking User Representative
Steve Neville	SN	Cycling user Representative
Anne Rillie	AR	Equestrian User Representative
Sarah Barker	SB	Parish Council Representative (Kent Association of Local Councils)
Mark Lawrence	ML	District Council Representative – Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Graham Rusling	GR	KCC PROW
Perry Cole	PC	KCC Cabinet Member
Laura Whitfield	LW	Natural England

Apologies

Charles Tassell	CT	Land Management Representative (CLA)
Amanda Corp	AC	Land Management Representative
Theresa Trussell	TT	Multi-User Representative
Chris Jelly	CJ	Dog Walking Representative
Andrew Hutchinson	AH	KCC PROW

Minutes

Deborah Scott	DS	KCC Prow – (Minutes)
---------------	----	----------------------

Welcome and Apologies

JBox welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were noted.

Minutes and Matters Arising from Last Meeting

1) Approval of previous meeting minutes

RD – Following on from the Safer Roads Presentation the issue of modern delivery drivers was raised but has not been answered.

Action: Carry Forward to Next Meeting

AR – **CT** was going to send **AR** the information about concrete structures for protecting gateways. [poacher block](#)

Action 1. GR to send the e-mail to AR

Minutes of the previous meeting approved with the above additions.

2) Matters Arising Not on the Agenda

AR – Referred to the 2026 cutoff date. **GR** explained that the position is now that the 2026 cutoff date will go ahead as planned and the Government has expressed its intention to extend by regulation the cutoff date to 2031. Discussion took place about the possible change of Government in 2024 and how this may impact on the introduction of the legislation.

Membership

Perry Cole

County Member for Swanley and Hextable. Member of KCC since 2021 and has an interest in PROWs.

Resignation

David Brazier has stepped down.

Action 2. GR to send a letter of thanks to David.

GR – asked what other sectors could be invited to the Forum to ensure broad representation. It was mentioned that previously Tourism, Rural Economy and Visit Kent sat on the Forum and perhaps the Forestry Commission, National Trust and Kent Wildlife Trust could be invited in future.

Contributing to Improved Health

GR – Exposure to the great outdoors and green space is greatly beneficial to physical and mental health. It reduces cortisol levels, blood pressure and cholesterol.

GR has been working with Public Health Teams. The approach is split into:

- *Upstream* covering health and wellbeing, housing, education, environment.
- *Downstream* which covers smoking, overeating, lack of exercise.

PROW were involved in the delivery of a couple of away days with Adult Social Care explaining to them the benefits of and how to access the natural environment.. This was well received and is now part of the ASC induction programme. The budget for Active Travel has been cut but there is a real focus on this.

Social Prescribing is being used increasingly including “prescribing” health walks, rather than drugs.

29% of the population have green space of at least half a hectare within 200 metre walk from home. 20% of people have green space, greater than 2 hectares within 300 metres and 38% have green space of greater than 10 hectares within a km from home.

9m people in the UK live within a km of blue space yet 3 to 5 of those households are generally deprived in one way or another.

One of the hurdles **GR** sees is how to link people with those benefits.

GR – asked, what are the barriers to access? The Rights of Way Improvement Plan mentions the physical barriers and mental barriers.

AR – The British Horse Society has a scheme called Changing Lives Through Horses. This is for people who have fallen out of education or are having great trouble with education. They can go to the stables and have contact with the horses. Touching and talking to animals can help people. The Riding for Disabled Association deal mainly with people with physical disorders and help people with psychological or mental difficulties. **AR** said that she has seen the results and it is fantastic.

AB – The term Health Walk can be a switch off for some people. **AB** would like to see approaches that include all other sorts of ways of getting people out and about, and how people can benefit from being outside with or without animal accompaniment.

ML – The term Health Walks is not used now. It was replaced 2 years ago as a Wellbeing Walk. **ML** was involved in a piece of work around engagement with members of the public and terminology used was a barrier. The Ramblers have changed over to doing Wellbeing Walks, which is a national scheme. Some districts have set up their own schemes but is very much around wellbeing. **ML** got involved with Wellbeing Walks in 2019 with the local GP and this was put in place to reduce social isolation.

What is key is that there is a Health Practitioner to encourage people to join these walks. Everyday Active Website ([Everyday Active Kent](#)) is a good resource for members of the public and GP's. It shows all activities that can be done in the countryside. People can find out what is going on in their local area.

SB – there is a need to get the message across to all residents. It was discussed about doing this on Twitter, Facebook and KALC news. There are area committees throughout Kent and all the area committee chairmen get together every 6 months and this could be raised with them. A Health and Wellbeing conference will be set up later this year between Social Services, Public Health and KALC to promote health and wellbeing. Some people do not follow social media so they are not aware of what is available to them. Some parishes have notice boards where posters could be placed.

JB – need to reduce the barriers to allow more people to participate in countywide access rather than promote health walks per say.

RP – The Ramblers are very successful in getting people out for gentle walks but not so successful for getting people out for longer walks. The new Chief Executive of the Ramblers Association is going to make it a priority to find a way in which the Ramblers can attract a broader cross section of society.

AB – there could be a greater wellbeing offer: cycle rides, pub walks, dog walks etc.

RD – It is surprising how many people do not know about PROWs. KCC used to publish leaflets promoting walks.

JB – the first thing **JB** gives new residents when they move to the village is a map of the PROWs. **JB** would like to develop a homeowner's pack for new residents, which would include PROWs.

AB – A public forest is where you can go with a family to walk, cycle, pony ride and this can be done relatively safely in the forest.

JB – There is Bedgebury Forest but it is cost inhibitive with the parking costs - £14.50.

AB – suggested a need to get a Forestry Commission representative back on the Forum.

JB – Landowners co-operation is required to make the PROWs welcoming.

AR – Suggested that the next meeting be an on-site meeting to look at some of these issues.

RP – the barriers to people accessing the countryside are parking costs, public transport, knowledge of what is available, who do you go with, and the physical barriers which are stiles, gates, traffic, safer roads and building developments.

SB – this is an ideal opportunity to speak to developers to promote access. Parishes should have a good connection with house builders.

Action 3. To be further discussed at next meeting

Development Sites (*standing item*)

1) RD – Hoo Peninsula Railway

This has been shelved by Medway Unitary Authority due to costs. A (Dartford/Bluewater) FastTrack style bus route is now the preferred option.

2) London Resort (Paramount World)

The developer has gone into administration. Development looks like it will now not go ahead BUT Ebbsfleet Development Corporation are allegedly now looking at the site for housing development.

3) Lower Thames Crossing

RD set out the current programme and key points:

09 March 2023 - There was an announcement at the last budget that the start of construction would be delayed by 2 years. This would allow more time for the funding to be made available.

06 April 2023 - Thurrock Council had asked for an extension to the pre-examination consultation for 3 months as they are the most affected by the scheme and have many issues with the plans. The Planning Inspectorate (Examining Authority-ExA) agreed an extension until July 2023.

Most Local Authorities have submitted a Principal Areas of Disagreement Summary (PADS) Tracker document. This lists the main areas of concern and what information in the application they dispute. KCC's document can be seen here:

[Infrastructure Planning Inspectorate](#)

It looks to cover the concerns KCAF have raised about local roads and the lack of detail on diverted/ created **permissive** routes around the scheme.

17 May 2023 – LTC -NH New Minor refinement consultation open until 19 June 2023. (Reduction in the land needed for Nitrogen Deposition compensation at Blue Bell Hill and Burham and Updating plans for utility works at East Tilbury to reduce the amount of land needed.)

16 May 2023 – Virtual Programming meeting to discuss issues raised by Local Authorities.

06 June 2023 – First Preliminary Meeting (Hybrid) at the London Stadium Stratford. Sets out how the Planning Inspectorate will examine all the evidence before making a decision. It is purely a procedural event. Mainly submissions from Local Authorities and landowners.

Although a further meeting on 20 June 2023 was timetabled the ExA decided this was not necessary but gave until 13 June 2023 to submit written representations.

*Unless something drastic is raised by today in the written representations to the Preliminary meeting the Examination will commence on **20 June 2023** and will last for 6 months.*

*Unless something drastic is raised by today in the written representations to the Preliminary meeting the Examination will commence on **20 June 2023** and will last for 6 months.*

20 June 2023, 6pm – Open Floor Hearing 1 (via MS Teams). Agenda not known at present. All Interested parties can take part and ask to address the meeting. (Possible future Open Floor meetings in person (and MS Teams-Hybrid) at Orsett, Essex 28 and 29 June 2023 and Dartford, Kent 05 and 06 July 2023)

21 June 2023, 10am – Issue Specific Hearing 1 (via MS Teams) – National Highways will be questioned about the DCO application by the ExA. Local Authorities, Utility Companies, Major landowners are expected to attend and contribute but other Interested parties (KCAF) can attend and ask to be heard.

22 June 2023, 10am – Issue Specific Hearing 2 (via MS Teams) – Appears to be a continuation of ISH 1.

Comments are required on LTC ASAP as written representation to the ExA needs to be submitted soon.

Site Inspections are due to take place, but no dates have been set yet. At the end of the 6-month examination the ExA will assess the Relevant Representations, decide what are the Principal Issues are for its Examination of the DCO.

From the end of Examination within 3 months the ExA will publish their reports. Again, within the following 3 months after the reports the ExA will give their decision. It is then up to the Secretary of State to confirm this decision.

National Highways have 5 years after a go-ahead decision (DCO granted) to start work. If they do not start the DCO process will have to be done again. A big local concern is that the more delay there is the more out of date and irrelevant things like the traffic modelling will become once the tunnel is open! Also, ongoing blight on the local areas and population.

Developer Contributions

JBox – Otterpool has been agreed. It deals with Folkestone and Hythe housing problems. Developer Contributions have been sought.

GR – Planning obligations can be sought under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 where the three tests are met. They must be:

1. Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.
2. Directly related to the development
3. Reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

Draft Response Guidance

JBox - This was discussed at the last meeting.

The Forum do not have the capacity to look at every individual planning application. The Forum, can, however, communicate with the borough councils and the parish councils who are organisations that we are here to offer advice to.

The Forum can offer advice and develop a document that helps them understand the opportunities for improvement to public rights of way countryside access and hopefully they will incorporate some of the Forum's ideas in the developers plans. It is predominately led by the local authority and parish councils. The document from Leicestershire can be edited and is a generic document.

KCC have a developer contributions guide which is going to Cabinet shortly.

JBox made comments on the developer contributions for the public rights of way.

Action4. **JBox** and **GR** to prepare a first draft.

Correspondence: White Cliffs Access

GR – Correspondence had been received by the Forum concerning Dover White Cliffs. The site was difficult to access due to a number of gates, steps and erosion that exposed chalk. 5 or 6 gates had been replaced and surfacing including the removal of 7 flights of steps had been completed.

Unfortunately, at the time the correspondent had visited the improvement works had not been completed.

The correspondent also opined that a more extensive network of bridleways would be beneficial as these are accessible to all. The Royal Military Canal was given as an example.

England Coastal Path (*standing item*)

LW – Nationally, as of May 2023, NE published proposals covered over 99% of the coast, of which 82%, 2,195 miles has been approved and establishment works are under way for 50% of the coast.

King Charles III England Coastal Path is open and access rights have commenced for 32% of the coast. All information is on the National Trails website.

Locally in Kent, the Ramsgate to Whitstable stretch will be open in the autumn and that will provide one long consistent coastal route from Camber to the Isle of Sheppey. Also planning to have the partial opening of the Iwade to Grain stretch which follows the Medway Estuary.

This is due to open in October and Medway Council is hoping to run an event to celebrate the trail at Riverside Country Park.

The stretch between Leysdown and Minster will be partially opened in the winter. Next year it is hoped that North Sheppey and the East side of the Medway Estuary will be complete providing a continuous walking route from London to Brighton.

There will be some celebratory events with local communities, and these are listed on the National Trials website.

AR – asked who gets invited to the opening of the paths. The Access Forum are usually invited to the opening / commencement of new stretches.

Action 5. LW to raise invitations with her team.

RP – the southern stretch of the Sheppey path needs some research on who owns the land and may be in a position to dedicate a linking footpath to break the very lengthy stretch along the south of the island.

Action 6. LW to discuss with KCIIIECP Team.

GR – Tom Kennedy, Trail Officer has now been recruited and is based in Lewes two days a week.

RP – a few people have been testing the coastal path as east of Gravesend is closed due to tyres and the diversion is not adequately signed and near Cliff Fort half the walkers go wrong in that area.

Action 7. GR to raise with Tom Kennedy and John Pelham

Any Other Business

AR - is seeking the update of OS maps to show permissive routes.

Next Meeting

Date: To Be Confirmed

Time: To Be Confirmed

Location: To Be Confirmed

Meeting Close

4:50pm