



MINUTES

Meeting Date: **09 September 2024**

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

Meeting Venue: **Aldington Village Hall, Roman Road, Aldington, Ashford, TN25 7EE**

Prior to the meeting there will be a site visit to Stonestreet Green Solar. Meeting at the Village Hall at 12:15pm

[Stonestreet Green Solar - Project information \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](https://planninginspectorate.gov.uk)

Attendees:

| | | |
|------------------|------|---|
| Jeremy Boxall | JBox | Chair |
| Anne Beecham | AB | (Vice chair) Tourism Representative |
| Anne Rillie | AR | Equestrian Representative |
| Charles Tassell | CT | Landowner/ Land Management Representative (CLA) |
| Robert Peel | RP | Walking Representative |
| Sarah Barker | SB | Parish Council Representative (KALC) |
| Theresa Trussell | TT | Multi-User Representative |
| Graham Rusling | GR | KCC Public Rights of Way and Access Service – Special Advisor |
| Kate Beswick | KB | KCC Public Rights of Way and Access Service – Special Advisor |
| Andrew Swarbrick | AS | Ramblers representative for the Aldington area. |

Minutes:

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| Serena Mitchell-Burns | SMB | KCC Public Rights of Way and Access Service |
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Action from this meeting:

September 2024 Action 1.

SMB to circulate the 'Let Nature Feed Your Soul' project website link.

September 2024 Action 2.

JBox to register interest with the Planning Inspectorate in regard to Stonestreet Green Solar project on behalf of KCAF.

September 2024 Action 3.

All Forum members to email thoughts and suggestions relating to the Stonestreet Green Solar project to **JBox** to collate, who will then set-up an MS Teams meeting to discuss further.

suggested that all members email their thoughts, suggestions, and questions to raise to him and he would collate these and then arrange an MS Teams meeting between the members to formalise their objection ready for when the planning application was at the comments/objections stage.

September 2024 Action 4.

SMB to circulate the link to the Stonestreet Green Solar project on the Planning Inspectorate website.

September 2024 Action 5.

GR to review and update the Public Rights of Way guidance on fencing/enclosing a Public Rights of Way path in collaboration with the Forum members.

1. Welcome and apologies:

JBox welcomed Andrew Swarbrick (**AS**) to the meeting as an Aldington resident and a member of the Ramblers with an interest in the plans of the Stonestreet Green solar farm and its effect on Public Rights of Way paths.

Apologies were received from Richard Dickenson, Rachel Carley, Perry Cole, and Mark Lawrence.

2. Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting:

Actions from meeting held on 03 June 2024:

June 2024 Action 1.

SMB to send out email to all forum members requesting written consent for their email address

to be shared with other forum members.

Completed.

June 2024 Action 2.

CD to circulate details of the making Space for Nature website and upcoming workshop events.

Completed.

Matters arising:

- a) **JBox** mentioned item 5 on the June minutes, which was 'Environmental Land Management', made note of getting people from deprived areas into the countryside and using public rights of way paths. He noted that he had previously worked on a project in collaboration with Natural England called '*Let Nature Feed Your Senses*' where the purpose of the project was to identify groups less likely to use green spaces, why this occurs, and how to combat this and make green spaces available and inclusive to everyone.

SMB will find the website and email the Forum members with a link to the project.

ACTION 1.

AB spoke about the management of some green spaces, and whether the way the areas were managed could be partially the issue of people in impoverished areas not accessing these spaces.

There followed a discussion between several Forum members about the reasons that some groups of people were unaware of the green spaces and the public rights of way in their areas, and what barriers there were to people's awareness and access.

GR noted that making information widely available regarding parks, public rights of way, village greens and common land, where these areas are, how accessible they are, etc. is vital in ensuring that everyone can benefit from green spaces.

AB stated that green spaces she had grown up using and benefitting from are often not well managed, overgrown, inaccessible, and this puts people off using these spaces.

There was also a discussion between several members of the Forum about equestrian use of public bridleways, and that there are less people horse riding in general and how to encourage people from all areas, including impoverished areas, to look at horse riding as an option for getting into the countryside.

- b) **SB** asked if there was any update on the progress of the Kent Ramblers project to renew and replace the county's parish maps currently displayed on their external map boards. **GR** advised that he and **RP** had been in discussions regarding this, and he will be chasing up on the part of the project that is now with KCC for approval. **SB** advised that once the project was at a suitable point KALC would be happy to advertise this to all Parish Councils.

3. Membership (*standing item*):

GR advised that PROW had been in contact with a couple of the Forum members who have not attended many meetings in the last two years to ascertain whether they wished to continue as Forum members or not.

Chris Jelly advised that he wished to resign as a KCAF member as he no longer has the time to put the commitment in to being an active member of the Forum.

GR advised that he has sent thanks to **CJ** for his work and input during his time as a Forum member, and **JBox** advised that the Forum members would do the same.

4. Stonestreet Green Solare Farm site visit – Discussion:

JBox opened a discussion amongst the Forum members about their site visit to the Stonestreet Green Solar farm prior to the meeting, and also asked the Forum members for suggestions and input on how KCAF will respond to the planned solar project.

AS advised that as a local resident and member of the Ramblers he has been keeping up to date with the project and planning application and advised that there have been two consultations so far, and an application has now been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. He advised that there is the option to register your interest on the Planning Inspectorate website, but this must be done by Thursday 12 September 2024.

AS advised that anyone registering interest with the Planning Inspectorate will be informed of timescales, actions, opportunities to provide comment, etc. throughout the process.

KB added that registering interest as well as receiving updates on the process also adds weight to the overall issue, and makes it clear to the Planning Inspectorate how much public interest and concern there is about the project.

AS advised that he has already registered his interest personally, and as a member of the Ramblers.

JBox confirmed that he would register interest with the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of KCAF.

ACTION 2.

JBox asked **GR** if PROW's position on the project was supported by the County Councillors, to which **GR** advised that KCC has not yet responded as there was still information to be gathered, and assessments and reports awaiting completion.

He did advise that KCAF, as a Local Authority Forum, can put their objections separately to KCC.

KB confirmed that as part of the project's Rights of Way Management Plan PROW have asked for details specifications on all the affected PROWs and how they will be managed.

AR asked if the Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) on the project site would be diverted or extinguished, and **KB** advised that this had not been proposed in the project's access plan.

KB also spoke about the connectivity across the wider areas and the advantages and disadvantages to the public that the project may bring. She advised that there would be a lot more discussions with the project developers relating to the public rights of way management plan, the Section 106 contributions and works, the PROW enhancements and new circular route cited in the developer's promotional material, as well as permissive routes on the site.

AR, AB and **TT** discussed at length their belief that there was the opportunity to upgrade current footpaths on site to bridleways.

JBox suggested that all members email their thoughts, suggestions, and questions to raise to him and he would collate these and then arrange an MS Teams meeting between the members to formalise their objection ready for when the planning application was at the comments/objections stage.

Action 3.

SMB to circulate the link to the Stonestreet Green Solar project on the Planning Inspectorate website.

ACTION 4.

5. Fencing / enclosure of Public Rights of Way:

GR gave a presentation on the fencing and enclosing of Public Rights of Way paths which often occurs in response to heavy use by the public, antisocial behaviour, and trespass.

He spoke about how the widths of PRow are established and byways, and how fencing or enclosing a path can encroach on the width. Additionally, vegetation growing along a line of fencing, or a hedge used as an enclosure can decrease the available width even further due to vegetation grown.

GR advised that the nature of enclosed paths was generally unpopular with users and often reduced the usage of the path, which then left lesser used paths to become naturally overgrown and in turn less usable.

GR's presentation provided a photographic example of one fenced path which when newly fenced had a good walking surface, however over the space of time the increased footfall in a confined area had caused the surface of the path to become degraded and resulted in an overly muddy unusable path.

GR's presentation noted that to encroach on the width and therefore use of a public rights of way path with a fence or other structure designed to enclose the path would be an obstruction of the path and removal of said obstruction would be enforceable by law.

GR concluded by advising that he will on behalf of PRow be reviewing and updated the guidance on fencing or enclosing a Public Right of Way path in consultation with KCAF.

Action 4.

SB asked for a copy of this guidance once updated so that KALC can share with Parish Councils to use when reviewing planning applications.

6. Development Sites (*standing item*):

RD was unable to attend the meeting but provided a short update by email on the Lower Thames Crossing.

He advised that there are ongoing discussions between the Planning Inspectorate, National Highways, Natural England, Gravesham Borough Council and KCC about levels of compensation funding for the Kent Downs National Landscape. KDNL are asking for £38m but NH are only offering around £7m.

We are still awaiting the decision by the Secretary of State due in October 2024.

GR mentioned a Lower Thames Crossing Funding Proposal relating to the Gravesham area which PROW applied to over 2 years ago and have now been given funding but with only a 6-month window to spend it.

PROW will be using the funding to look at ways of monitoring the use and footfall on paths within the designated area. This could include the use of anonymised digital data from mobile phone apps which use location information instead of the currently used electronic counter systems in place. This could vastly improve the quality of data about path users, types and times of footfall, as well as where the path users have come from and are going to, which in turn will improve how PROW accesses and interacts with different path user groups.

7. Public Rights of Way Update:

a) Fragmentation Analysis (ATE Capability fund)

GR spoke about the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and the network of higher rights public paths where some lead on to public roads and the work that can be done around this issue.

He advised that Active Travel England have Capability Fund money to invest in a project looking at these types of paths and the on-road links between them. They will then look at, amongst other things, options around path verge improvements, quiet lanes and their current vehicular use and whether there are opportunities to improve crossings.

b) Gravesham LTC Designated Funds Project

Discussed at item 6.

c) KCIIECP – Plough Road

GR advised that the section of the KCIIECP at Plough Road, Sheppey has now been through three rounds of assessments but is providing a challenge as to how to keep the path off public roads while still keeping it accessible to users.

There may come a point soon when this section of the path has to continue on to the public road at which time PROW will do everything possible to mitigate the dangers to users of road walking.

AB noted that walking on a public road from one footpath to another may be hard for pedestrian path users but is worse for equestrians as there are many bridleways where there are long sections of public road use, and she feels that horse riding is becoming marginalised by this.

d) National Planning Policy Framework

GR advised that there is a proposed revision of the National Planning Policy Framework and a consultation around this which closes on 24 September 2024.

Information about the consultation and a draft of the proposed changes can be found on the Gov.UK website [here](#).

8. Correspondence (standing item):

No correspondence was received.

9. Any Other Business:

a) **RP** mentioned the Deregulation Act and the previous 2026 cut-off date and noted that KCAF previously wrote to the Government regarding this and suggested that this should be sent again now to the new Government.

Forum members agree, and **RP** will resent the letter as an updated version.

Next meeting:

Date: **09 December 2024**

Time: **2pm to 4pm**

Venue: **MS Teams meeting**