

KCAF Meeting

Meeting Date:

11 September 2023

Meeting Time:

Site visit at 12.00pm

Meeting at 2:00pm

Meeting Venue:

Site visit at Teston Bridge Country Park

Meeting at Waterringbury Village Hall, Waterringbury, Kent

Attendees:		
Jeremy Boxall	JBox	Chair
Richard Dickenson	RD	(Vice Chair) Vehicular User Representative
Robert Peel	RP	Walking User Representative
Anne Rillie	AR	Equestrian User Representative
Mark Lawrence	ML	Health & Wellbeing Representative (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council)
Graham Rusling	GR	KCC PROW
Perry Cole	PC	KCC Cabinet Member
Apologies		
Anne Beecham	AB	(Vice chair) Tourism Representative
Sarah Barker	SB	Parish Council Representative (Kent Association of Local Councils)
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		
Serena Mitchell-Burns	SMB	KCC PROW

Welcome and Apologies

JBox provided the meeting welcome.

Apologies were provided for Anne Beecham, Sarah Barker, Charles Tassell, Amanda Corp, Theresa Trussell, Chris Jelly, and Adnrew Hutchinson.

Minutes and Matters Arising from Last Meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting on 12 June 2023 were approved.
2. here were no matters arising not on the agenda.

Actions from Meeting on 11 September 2023	
Action 1	GR to speak to Miranda Palmer, KCC Active Travel, for suggestions on a cycling representative to join the forum.
Action 2	PC to contact Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council regarding their 'Talking Lamp Post' trails for information about some data on usage, cost of installation and maintenance, etc.
Action 3	GR to provide forum with new guidance currently being created to outline PROW and SE England Coast Path National Trail Officer responsibilities in relation to Kent stretch of the King Charles III England Coastal Path.
Action 4	GR to advise KCC that both KCAF and the BHS be consulted directly regarding KCWIPs.

Membership

GR advised the forum that Steve Neville, Cycling Representative, has resigned from the Kent Countryside Access Forum.

The forum members discussed the best organisations to recruit a cycling representative from, however, **GR** advised that a new member who represented both on-road and off-road cycling would be preferential to fully encompass the cycling representative role within KCAF. It was suggested that **GR** speak to Miranda Palmer, KCC's Active Travel for cycling representative suggestions. **ACTION 1**

GR advised that as well as requiring a new member to represent cycling, to maintain a balance of interests across the members of the forum he will be approaching both the National Trust and Forestry Commission to advise them that KCAF will be advertising for new members and their representation would be beneficial to the forum if they chose to apply. The Kent Wildlife Trust and Kent Nature Partnership were also suggested as options to recruit new KCAF members for broader representation.

GR has advised that PROW will advertise for members on the KCC website and in local press as per Government guidance for Local Access Forum member appointments.

Site Visit – Teston Bridge Country Park

1. Observations – good practice

RD spoke about access to blue spaces, areas of surface waterbodies or watercourses, within Kent such as those at Teston Bridge Country Park by the public for activities such as

canoeing, paddle boarding, swimming, etc. and how the public believe that many rivers and waterways are private land and that their access to these areas is more limited than it is.

Many water sports do require permits in many blue spaces, but these are available to purchase in advance and some clubs such as canoe or paddle board clubs include permits in their membership fees.

The forum members discussed the costs involved in purchasing permits, and the lack of awareness regarding the requirement for these permits or where to purchase them as this is not widely advertised.

However, it was agreed that the forum's role was to ensure that the public have awareness of the blue spaces available to them, and where and how they can access them.

2. Barriers to access – guidance

JBox noted that when travelling to a blue space or a country park that parking could be prohibitive to some people due to both the cost of the parking and the availability of areas to park.

Added to this public transport is not always an option due to nearby bus or train routes and the frequency of buses or trains.

It was suggested that it might be prudent for PROW to publicise parking and public transport facilities for users to access blue spaces and country parks, and it was suggested that Explore Kent may be an option for this to use their online and social media platforms. It was also suggested that if a country park is accessible by public transport, it would be preferable for signage and timetables to be available at the park to advise of this.

GR advised that there is more information available online now either on the country park's own website, or others sites such as Explore Kent.

GR advised that although he agreed parking and public transport can be a barrier for users who wish to travel to get to a country park or a Public Rights of Way path there are also options for users who could walk to parks or PROWs from home.

Forum members agreed with walking from home, however they did note that there needs to be more enforcement of public paths through new housing developments to be able to provide walks from home.

It was also stated that for many walking to a country park or PROW from home is an option, for some users they either don't have parks or walks close to their home or wish to vary their countryside use with different walks, parks, and blue spaces.

PC spoke about the new 'Talking' [Hello Lamp Post](#) that some areas are introducing where signage can be attached to lamp posts, a bench, or even a flower planter, with a number to text or a QR code to scan that will then provide you with information relevant to the area you are in such as public transport timetables, or you can ask questions about the area and its amenities through its text or online chat functions.

PC suggested that he could talk to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council about the 'Talking Lamp Posts' they have been trialling for some data on usage, cost of installation and maintenance, etc. **ACTION 2**

Forum members suggested that KCC Country Parks and Public Rights of Way could look at linking up with bus operators to offer deals for families, children, older users, etc. to encourage people to get out to the countryside by making travel there more affordable.

It was noted that no cycle rack had been sighted at Teston Bridge Country Park and no mention of cycling on the park's website, and wondered if it could be better advertised as cycle friendly to encourage users.

Items noted for future KCAF meetings raised during the site visit were:

- Volunteers.
- Vegetation clearance.
- Removal of cut vegetation from site & use for mulching.
- Radar locks and keys.
- Signage wording relating to the use of mobility scooters on site.
- Better promotion of disabled access through websites and publications.

Development Sites (*standing item*)

1. Lower Thames Crossing

RD provided the meeting with an update on the Lower Thames (LTC) Crossing development. Dates of process to note:

- 18 July 2023 – deadline for written submission and summary, this was accepted.
- 18 July 2023 – Procedural Deadline D, request to become interested party.
- 03 August 2023 – Deadline 3, comments on written representations and applicants' response to these.
- 24 August 2023 – Deadline 3, responses to comments on written representations.
- 06 September – Fourth Open Floor Hearing allowing questions and anyone to make their views known.
- 20 December 2023 – process end, the Planning Inspectorate will then have 3 months to prepare a report on the application stating whether they recommend approval or not. The Secretary of State then has 3 months to grant or refuse permission. Following this there will be a 6-week period to allow the decision to be challenged in the High Court.

There have also been Issue Specific Hearings attended by Local Authorities, utility companies, landowners, industries, etc. to discuss land allocated for building the Lower Thames Crossing, mitigation, compensation, traffic modelling, tunnel design etc.

There will also be upcoming accompanied site inspections and compulsory purchase hearings, deadlines to update PADs (Principal Areas of Disagreement Summary) and SoCGs (Statements of Common Ground).

2. Draft response- guidance from KCAF.

Prior to the meeting **JBOX** circulated to forum members his draft copy of the KCAF Guidance to Developers for their comments.

GR suggested that the document could signpost towards the Public Rights of Way Design Guide.

The following topics were discussed in relation to the draft document:

- Paths bordered by hedges or fences being wide enough to allow access for mechanical machinery needed to maintain the path.

- New paths through housing developments being clearly signed so that the public know where the public paths begin and end.
- Stricter guidance on the Section 106 Agreements with developers to ensure Public Rights of Way paths are included, and up to the required standards.
- Adding to the guidance that all PROWs should be adopted by the Authority, and if not to be adopted they should be well signposted as public paths.

JBox will re-draft the guidance and circulate for further comments and advised that he would also like a planning authority to view and comment before final submission.

For circulation of the final approved draft of the guidance **JBox** has asked **GR** to provide a list of planning authority contacts to circulate to, and he will also ask **SB** to circulate to Parish Councils through KALC.

3. Further guidance / advice – development and vehicle access.

GR noted that the level of vehicle users on bridleways means it has become a nuisance to some users. As such he advised that he has completed a guidance on vehicular access when affecting a PROW and what mitigations are put in place.

GR will circulate this to KCAF members for information purposes.

DEFRA Guidance

GR spoke about the Deregulation Act's new draft guidance which has been produced relating to the presumption in favour of diversion away from domestic curtilage. The presumption advises that if the application to divert a public path has been made for the reasons of privacy, security, etc. then the Authority should move in favour of making an order if all the tests have been met.

GR advised that in Kent the Public Rights of Way and Access Service already take reasons of privacy and security in to account as long as all the tests to divert a path have been met, and therefore does not believe this will impact significantly on the current process. However, the new Presumptions guidance may generate applications which have previously been declined where applicants believe the new guidance will change the previous decision or that they now meet the tests where they previously didn't meet them, however this is unlikely to be the case in previously declined applications due to Kent PROW's already rigorous processes.

King Charles III England Coastal Path (*standing item*)

1. Update on progress of the establishment of the King Charles III England Coastal path

GR updated the meeting on the opening of more stretches of the KCIIECP:

- Medway stretches - 08 October 2023
- Ramsgate to Whitstable – 25 October 2023
- Isle of Sheppey stretches – end of October 2023
- Iwade to Grain – issues still to be resolved, awaiting inspector's decision.

GR advised the meeting about the new SE England Coast Path National Trail Officer, Tom Kennedy. He advised that PROW would continue with maintenance of the path, and TK will deal with projects and development.

GR advised that **PROW** and **TK** will be creating a formalised document to outline each party's responsibilities in relation to the **KCIIIECP**, and he will bring a copy of this to the December 2023 **KCAF** meeting for information purposes. **ACTION 3**

2. General amenity / ASB relating to North Kent stretches.

GR advised the meeting on various stretches of the **KCIIIECP** within North Kent which have been problematic due to flytipping, antisocial behaviour, unsanitary debris washed ashore from the Thames, etc. and have had a negative impact on users' enjoyment of the path through this area of Kent.

He advised that the Public Rights of Way Service are working hard with the district Councils in the areas to resolve these ongoing issues.

3. Coastal margin safety

Item taken forward to discuss at meeting on 11 December 2023.

Active Travel

1. KCWIP – Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plane

GR advised the meeting that there would be a consultation coming out within the following quarter regarding Kent's Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan.

JBox asked if **KCC** could be reminded that both **KCAF** and the British Horse Society should be consulted directly regarding **KCWIPs**. **ACTION 3**

2. LCWIP – Local Cycling and Infrastructure Plan

GR advised the meeting that there will also be an upcoming consultation on Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plans within the County.

GR advised the forum that it would be worth reminding District Councils that **KCAF** should be consulted directly on **LCWIPs**.

Correspondence (standing order)

Nothing to note regarding correspondence.

Any Other Business

1. RP advised the meeting that the Kent & East Sussex Ramblers have produced a new guide to the Weald Way booklet entitled 'The Wealdway', which is available to purchase from their website.

2. RD advised the meeting that he had received notice of Kent County Council's budget consultation and recommended comments be made.

3. RD spoke about a case where the BHS have submitted a claim application on an unclassified bridleway and would like to know if successful would this then stop vehicular rights on the route. **GR** advised that this is a very complicated legal issue which **PROW** are currently receiving legal advice on.

Next Meeting

Date: **Monday 11 December 2023**

Time: **TBC**

Location: **MS Teams**

Meeting Close