



MINUTES

Meeting Date: **03 June 2024**

Site Visit: **Blean Woods**

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

Meeting Venue: **Blean Village Hall, 2 School Lane, Blean, Canterbury, CT2 9JA**

Attendees:

Anne Beecham	AB	(Vice chair) Tourism Representative
Richard Dickenson	RD	(Vice Chair) Vehicular User Representative
Anne Rillie	AR	Equestrian Representative
Charles Tassell	CT	Landowner/ Land Management Representative (CLA)
Robert Peel	RP	Walking Representative
Theresa Trussell	TT	Multi-User Representative
Cllr Perry Cole	PC	KCC Elected Member
Graham Rusling	GR	KCC Public Rights of Way & Access Service – Special Advisor
Andrew Hutchinson	AH	KCC Public Rights of Way & Access Service – Special Advisor
Emma Peters	EP	KCC Public rights of Way & Access Service – Definitive Map Officer
Chris Drake	CD	KCC Partnerships and Projects Officer

Apologies:

Jeremy Boxall	Jbox	Chair
Sarah Barker	SB	Parish Council Representative (KALC)

Minutes:

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

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.

Action 2. **CD** to circulate details of the making Space for Nature website and upcoming workshop events.

1. Welcome and apologies:

Jeremy Boxall was unable to attend this quarterly meeting, **Richard Dickenson** and **Graham Rusling** joint chaired the meeting in his absence.

Apologies for absence were received from **JBox** and **SB**.

Emma Peters, Public Rights of Way and Access service Definitive Map Officer joined this quarter's site visit and meeting as the Officer dealing with the creation of the public paths relating to the 'Bison bridges/tunnels' at Blean woods where the site visit was held.

Also joining the meeting was **Chris Drake**, KCC Partnerships and Projects Officer to talk to the forum members about the 'Making Space for Nature' project.

2. Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting:

AR noted the omission of a key point from the Minutes of the 25 March 2024 meeting relating to her item on 'Equestrian Use of Highway Margins & Cycle Tracks' and would like this recorded in the 03 June 2024 Minutes.

With reference to the path at Peters Village KCC Highways have suggested that a separate bridleway could be constructed to run parallel to the current public path, however **AR** and the BHS consider that the currently path is completely suitable for equestrian use and could be a multi-purpose route for users if the designation of the route and the signage were amended to reflect this.

Actions from meeting held on 25 March 2024:

Action 1.

GR to circulate development planning references and information.

- **Completed.**

Action 2.

GR to provide Active Travel England contact details to **AR**.

- **To be actioned.**

Action 3.

GR to circulate 'Smarter Regulation Proposed Changes to Legislation for Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles' consultation questions.

- **Completed.**

Action 4.

GR to arrange site visits for June and September meetings. **SMB** to arrange venues for June and September meetings.

- **Completed.**

3. Membership (standing item):

AR raised the point of sharing KCAF member email addresses when circulating information within the forum as this would be beneficial to anyone wishing to 'reply to all'.

SMB advised that for GDPR data protection reasons permissions will be required from forum members agreeing to their email addresses to be shared with other forum members and KCC Officers, and she will send an email out to all requesting written consent for their email address to be shared with other forum members.

ACTION 1.

GR advised that there is no further update on recruiting new KCAF members.

4. Nature Recovery Strategy Site Visit – discussion:

Prior to the meeting there was a site visit to Blean Woods and the location of the Bison reintroduction project which is necessitating the minor diversion of public paths and the provision of several structures (bridges/ bison tunnels), as well as for the forum to consider Nature Recovery Strategies.

GR spoke about the renewed focus on land management using nature, and as part of this the reintroduction of native species and how this affects the use of public rights of way paths, and where path diversions will be required, and in Blean Woods where the new bison bridges/tunnels will be created.

GR then introduced Chris Drake, KCC Partnerships and Projects Officer who spoke to the forum about the 'Making Space for Nature' project. He talked about the purpose and aims of the local nature recovery strategies, the ongoing development of the project, stakeholder participation, how people can get involved with the project, and the upcoming workshop events.

The meeting was opened to questions and **RD** asked about what real on-the-ground benefits the project would bring to users, to which **CD** advised about the landowner collaborations and

improved management in existing areas, positive nature-based solutions, influence over planning and Local Plans, and how the project will also help with identifying future funding needs.

CT as the Country Land and Business Association representative on the forum spoke about the currently available funding to agricultural landowners and that there are biodiversity collaborations which are good at identifying where key species could flourish, and once identified funding could then be directed appropriately. He also said that the supportive presence of KCC has been viewed as very positive.

RP asked as the walking representative and Kent Ramblers member if there would be any benefits to walkers in the way of new or extended routes, to which **CD** advised that although there would be overall benefits to walkers as well as other users creating new routes was not specifically part of the strategy as the aim of the project is nature recovery.

RP also asked if the making Space for Nature project could see restrictions on public access to the countryside if it was deemed beneficial to nature, there was no answer to this question.

RD and **GR** both noted that the recovery and improvement of nature in green spaces will be a benefit to all users aesthetically, as well as to their physical and mental wellbeing.

AB suggested that national support would be beneficial to this project to share ideas, feedback, and work across the whole country. **CD** confirmed that DEFRA do have a nature recovery project that the 48 areas who each have their own Making Space for Nature projects in progress report back to DEFRA on.

Finally, **CD** advised that he would circulate to the forum members the links to the making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway website and the information about the upcoming workshop events.

ACTION 2

[Homepage | Making Space For Nature Kent](#)

5. Environmental Land Management – Permissive Access:

GR spoke to the meeting the Government's Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme update and the move from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to their new Environmental Land Management scheme. EU subsidies for land ownership and tenure are being phased out to be replaced with the new Environmental Land Management scheme.

GR talked about the possible effect on ensuring that Rights of Way remain open and accessible to the public, as well as permissive routes and access.

The forum members discussed who benefits from the new schemes and agreements, the lack of consultation, the maintenance of permissive routes, and what happens after the termination of a permissive agreement on a publicly used route.

RP noted there was an initiative as part of the ELM scheme to encourage people from deprived areas out into the countryside. **GR** mentioned the woodland creation near deprived areas, to encourage countryside access and use.

AB and **PC** both noted that they had found many people, especially from deprived areas, are not as interested in accessing the countryside as they have been in the past, and there is a need to find out why and how to approach this issue.

6. Parish Maps:

RP spoke to the forum about the Kent Ramblers project to renew and replace the county's parish maps currently displayed on their external map boards.

He advised that Kent Ramblers currently have funding available due to the sales of their 'Guided Walks' booklets to help parishes with updating their parish maps, many of which are faded, worn, and have outdated information and routes showing on them.

They have created a draft template of what each map should show and should include such as the information, images, logos, etc. and have submitted these to KCC for approval. **RP** advised that there is a limited timescale related to the availability of the funding to get this project moving forward and asked **GR** to help push the approval of the templates onwards.

GR advised that the approval is currently with Explore Kent who will have the final say, and has advised that he will raise this with Explore Kent to try and move the project on.

7. Development sites (*standing item*):

a) Lower Thames Crossing

RD advised that the examination period has now ended and is currently with the Secretary of State awaiting a decision.

However, he also advised that due to the General Election now on 04 July 2024 the decision date has been moved from 24 May 2024 to 04 October 2024.

RD advised that there remain ongoing discussions between the Secretary of State, landowners, Crown Estates, and the Duchy of Lancaster.

Also new legislation has come into force relating to National Landscapes (AONBs) since the Development Consent Order (DCO) was created and as such National Highways are now required to redraft the document.

8. Public Rights of Way Update:

GR provided the meeting with an update on the following items:

a) Smarter Regulation Response

GR has submitted responses on behalf of both KCC and IPROW to the Government consultation on the proposed regulation changes on electrically assisted pedal cycles. He also noted that in general cycling organisations were against the proposed legislation changes.

b) PROW Vegetation Clearance Procurement

AH provided an update on the renewal of vegetation clearance contracts, which has been collaborated on between PROW and KCC's Procurement team and has now been approved by KCC Committee. He is now involved in market engagement for feedback ready for the tendering process.

RD asked about the effectiveness of cleared paths under the previous contracts as many routes, even those with higher rights, are cleared to less than the minimum requirement. This results in a few months growth rendering the path impassable again. **GR** advised that the new contracts will state clearly the dimensions of the route to be cleared.

c) Right to Apply in Two Tier Areas

GR provided an update on the Right to Apply section of the Deregulation Act and the provision within the Act that both County and District Councils will have the powers to make Orders. DEFRA had not addressed this issue as District Councils are not equipped to process and make orders are now looking at a regulatory solution to this by delegating these powers from the District Councils to the County Council.

d) 2031 Exceptions

GR advised that the previous Secretary of State had chosen not to include within the Deregulation Act exceptions relating to routes in current use, however subsequently this has been changed by the new Secretary of State.

It was noted that the 2031 exceptions relate to the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 cut of date for recording a Public Rights of Way path on the Definitive Map, the date of which was moved forward from the original 2025 cut-off.

e) King Charles III England Coast Path

GR provided an update on the King Charles III England Coast Path with sections due to open on the Isle of Sheppey in late 2024, except for a stretch in north Sheppey due to erosion and a section at the Kingsferry Bridge which has also encountered delays.

9. Correspondence (*standing item*):

There was no correspondence received.

10. Any Other Business:

There were no items raised under any other business.

Next meeting:

Date: **Monday 09 September 2024**

Site Visit time: **12:15pm**

Site visit location: **Stone Street Solar Farm.**

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

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