

MINUTES

Meeting Date: **Monday 24 March 2025**

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

Meeting Venue: **MS Teams**

Attendees:

Jeremy Boxall	JBox	Chair
Anne Beecham	AB	(Vice chair) Tourism Representative
Amanda Corp	AC	Landowner/ Land Management Representative (NFU)
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
Rosie Salt-Crockford	RSC	CLA Rural Surveyor for Kent
Graham Rusling	GR	KCC Public Rights of Way and Access Service – Special Advisor

Apologies:

Richard Dickenson (RD)	(Vice Chair) Vehicular User Representative
Mark Lawrence	Health & Wellbeing Representative (Tunbridge Wells BC)

Minutes:

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

March 2025 Action 1.	GR to approach Ginny Mitchell as a new Health & Wellbeing representative.
March 2025 Action 2.	GR to approach Mark Robson, Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) Chair, about someone from the TRF joining the Forum as a member.
March 2025 Action 3.	GR to circulate the National Housing Policy Framework in relation to the 'Amendments to Housing Supply Requirements' section to the Forum members.
March 2025 Action 4.	GR to circulate a draft of PROW's 'Design Guidance' to the Forum members.

1. Welcome and apologies:

JBox began the meeting by welcoming **Rosie Salt-Crockford** (RSA), who is a Rural Surveyor for Country Land & Business Association (CLA) for the Kent area and who will be joining the KCAF meetings on a regular basis going forward.

JBox provided apologies from **Richard Dickenson** and **Mark Lawrence**.

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

2. Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting:

Actions from meeting held on 09 December 2024:

December 2024 Action 1.

SMB to coordinate with **CT** on adding Rosie Salt-Crockford, CLA Hampshire to the KCAF email distribution list.

Completed

December 2024 Action 2.

GR to contact Amanda Corp about whether she remains a KCAF member as she has not attended meetings in the last few years.

Completed

December 2024 Action 3.

GR to circulate redrafted 'Enclosure of Paths' document to members for further comments.

Completed

3. Membership (*standing item*):

- a) **GR** advised that he has been informed by Mark Lawrence that he is changing his role within Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and as such will no longer continue as the Health & Wellbeing representative on the Kent Countryside Access Forum.
GR has suggested in regard to a replacement Health & Wellbeing representative that he would like to approach Ginny Mitchell as a new Forum member, as she is involved in a lot of work with PROW relating to accessibility and specifically wheelchair users.
The forum members confirmed they are happy for **GR** to approach the prospective new Forum member. **Action 1.**
- b) **CT** suggested approaching the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) about being represented on the Forum as they had previously had a representative some years ago.
The Forum members agreed to this, and **GR** advised that he was happy to approach the current TRF Chair Mark Robson with this suggestion. **Action 2.**
- c) **JBox** asked if anyone had any suggestions for a Tourism Member for the Forum.
AB noted that she had previously been the Tourism Representative on the Forum but was no longer involved in tourism herself but will look through her contacts for prospective new representative for the Forum who is still actively involved in tourism.

4. Development sites (*standing item*):

- a) **Lower Thames Crossing -**
RD provided an email update as he was unable to attend the meeting and advised that there was a general misunderstanding following the new Chancellor of the Exchequer's Speech on 29 January 2024 where it was believed the scheme had been approved to go ahead; however the speech actually stated that the Government would like the scheme to go ahead but was looking at private finance options.
National Highways have been looking for alternative funding for several years and had until 27 February 2025 to submit a revised funding statement to the Secretary of State. An announcement on this is now due to be made by 23 May 2025.
- b) **Stonestreet Solar -**
JBox advised that a late submission by KCAF had been completed and submitted in December 2024.
GR advised that he attended an in-person round table session at the hearing and had also appeared at the East Stour Solar public inquiry.
GR noted that there are currently no national standards relating to solar projects which can be used when reviewing planning applications and objections.

AB asked if there had been any mention of the decommissioning of the solar projects and removal of the panels once the projects come to their end of life.

RP noted that members of The Ramblers who attended the meeting advised that the Planning Inspector had asked developers to come back with more information regarding decommissioning to be included in their plans.

c) Highstead Park -

GR noted that this is nationally notable as it is the largest planning inquiry involving homes and will be subject to a PROW round table discussion in May 2025 on the development issues and affects.

GR reported that there will be a PROW Management Scheme connected to the Section 106 agreement and conditions relating to disruption during construction phase, path diversions, temporary closures, and more.

Updates on the case can be followed on the [Planning Inspectorate website](#).

d) South Faversham -

GR advised that there is a current application to be viewed on the Swale Borough Council website. This is a 2000 home development and PROW will be looking for Section 106 agreement contributions, and Network Rail will be looking at the installation of a new bridge linking different sections of the site.

e) Amendments to Housing Supply Requirements -

GR spoke about the Government reissue of the National Planning Policy Framework including revised policies relating to housing supply. GR to supply the new guidance to Forum members.

[National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Action 3.

5. Least Restrictive Access:

a) Lived Experience Session –

GR spoke about the PROW Development Day in December 2024, which related to accessibility. As part of the day Officers engaged in an Accessibility Lived Experience run by Kent National Landscapes in conjunction with Cinque Ports Mobility.

The Officers experienced using wheelchairs of different designs for both urban and rural use across different terrains. All Officers said the experience illustrated the difficulties experienced by just one section of the disabled community and will be of great help when specifying work and assessing proposals.

b) Sustrans project to remove limitations to the National Cycle Network –

GR spoke about a section of the National Cycle Route in Gravesend, NCR1, where Sustrans have secured funding to improve a large stretch of the route and PROW has secured funding for a smaller stretch of the route.

As part of this funded work Sustrans are aiming to make this route as accessible as possible, which will include removing many of the barriers currently in place along the route. There have been objections from members of the public who want the barriers to remain to prevent access by motorcycle users, however as **GR** advised in regard to the Public Sector Equality Duties barriers on public paths are prohibitive to use by people with accessibility requirements.

RD provided input by email in his absence and advised that the project involves surfacing of NCR1 along the canal path from Gravesend to Shorne. Some of this route shared with walkers has been tarmacked but the issue local users have raised is the barriers, designed to prevent illegal motorcycle access along and onto the marshes, which were due to be removed.

Several of the Forum members discussed the increased use of electric bikes on public rights of way paths and what regulations, enforcement, and signage there is available to regulate proper and safe usage.

JBox suggested that the Forum members look in to how other counties are dealing with electric vehicles on public rights of way to determine if there is anything Kent could take from this.

6. PROW Update:

a) National Highways: Designated Funds Projects –

GR spoke about the following projects by PROW funded by National Highways Designated Funds:

- Research in to use and impediments to use of public paths within the Gravesham area, which is due to be concluded by the end of March.
- Works on surfacing and signage on the public footpath and National Cycle Route NG3, Medway Canal Path.
- Surface improvements to the Byway Open to All Traffic ER129, Scotland Common.
- Funding received from Active Travel England for works on the Medway Towpath section from Maidstone to Aylesford.

b) Definitive Map: Cut-off date repeal -

GR spoke about the Deregulation Act and the letter written by KCAF to the Secretary of State in December 2024 about the cut-off date, and since then there has been an announcement of 26 December 2025 that the cut-off date will be repealed.

There are still several elements within the Deregulation Act to be discussed and moved forward.

GR also spoke about PROW's current backlog figures for Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) applications, and that the statistics between the historic and the user-based applications are currently being reviewed with the aim of updating the Statement of Priorities to improve the application processing timescales. Once the review has been completed this will then be presented to KCC Committee for approval.

c) Design Guidance –

GR spoke about guidance relating to public rights of way design. This would be of value in responding to and assisting landowners/ land managers and developers in designing projects. E.g. fencing public rights of way, setting out solar parks, vineyards.

GR noted that in respect of vineyards these are treated the same way that Developments in respect of processing timescales if Public Path Orders are required,

RD provided the following comment by email in his absence relating to vineyards - *"Most of the development of these vineyards and buildings are being approved under the GPDO Permitted Development legislation. A previous court case - Millington v the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999) is always quoted as precedent for building bottling plants, wineries etc without seeking full Planning Approval. This case involved a very small operation as a sideline on a small farm selling a few bottles a year directly to the public. The judge was clear in his summing up of this case that it was only this small-scale operation as part of the general agricultural business of the farm that allowed the Development to go ahead under Permitted Development. The latest schemes in Kent are larger enterprises involved in viniculture only, are erecting substantial structures on agricultural land, so should not be covered under the precedent set by the Millington case!"*

GR advised that he would circulate the draft 'PROW Design Guidance' to the Forum members for feedback and discussion.

Action 4.

7. King Charles III England Coastal Path (standing item):

a) General progress –

GR advised that the Secretary of State has made a decision and approved NE's recommendations for two sections of the KCIIIECP at Iwade.

Works will commence this year, although clearance work is likely to have to wait until awaiting the end of bird-nesting season.

b) Sheppey opening -

GR advised that the section of the KCIIIECP at Hensbrook, Sheppey may need to be modified as the existing route currently goes through some paddocks.

It is expected to have the majority of the Isle of Sheppey section of the KCIIIECP opened in the summer with a formal opening on 24 June 2025.

GR also advised that the South East England Coast Path National Trail Partnership is fully operational, with Thomas Kennedy as the SE England Coast Path National Trail Officer.

8. Correspondence (*standing item*):

JBox noted that **SMB** had circulated to Forum members a Government Local Access Forum email received by PROW relating to updated Forum contacts and access to their SharePoint folders, although he has requested access, he is still currently awaiting this.

9. Any Other Business:

a) Local Government Review –

GR spoke about the Devolution Priority Plan (DPP): Kent's application for inclusion had been declined. Government had advised that the county will be subject to a Local Government Reorganisation.

All the authorities in Kent were required to formulate and submit their initial views on a structure for a reorganised Kent to Central Government by 21 March 2025.

b) KCC Lets Talk Kent Consultation Portal -

RD provided comment by email in advance of his absence at the meeting regarding KCC's [Lets Talk Kent](#) portal where members of the public can find information on consultations, projects, public engagement, feedback, and more.

He noted that he has been signed up for some time to receive details of consultations on highways and countryside matters but had felt that PROW consultations should also be available to sign up for. He has recently seen that this has now been added to the portal and has signed up for both Public Rights of Way and Village Green consultations lists.

GR advised that the PROW Definition Team have been working on the structure of the PROW and Village Green consultations lists so that members of the public have the opportunity to sign up and choose which districts within Kent they wish to receive consultation updates for, rather than having to receive all the consultations for the whole of Kent.

He advised that there will also be weekly newsletters sent out to anyone signed up for consultation updates advising on the latest consultations.

c) **JBox** spoke about the mapping of permissive public rights of way paths and whether there was anything KCAF could do to facilitate this happening.

GR responded to advise that this has recently been flagged with both DEFRA and Natural England in relation to Environmental Land Management Schemes as the majority of access options on these are permissive ones.

There was a discussion amongst the Forum members in regard to this as a mapping project in relation to cost and promotion.

GR noted that there may be complications around landowners who provide permissive routes without a written agreement, permissive routes once the agreement has expired, and Section 106 contribution routes.

There was further discussion about the option to record a list or map of the County's Section 106 routes, and **AR** asked whether Explore Kent could promote these online.

SB advised that KALC could be involved in the recording of a Section 106 path list or map, and asked to be copied on any correspondence AR sends out relating to this.

GR noted that he will discuss with PROW's Systems & Data Officer whether there is an option to record the permissive paths on a layer of the Public Rights of Way network map.

Future Meeting Items:

JBox asked for suggestions for site visits for the June and September KCAF meetings.

GR suggested for the June site visit Wye Crown and bridleway AE109 which has recently had a trial surface of aggregate mix laid to make the path more accessible to users.

Jbox asked the Forum members for further site visit suggestions, and agenda items for the next meeting.

Meeting closed.

Next meeting:

Date: **Monday 02 June 2025**

Site Visit Time: **12pm**

Site Visit Location: **Wye Crown (AE109)**

Meeting time: **2pm to 4pm**

Meeting Venue: **Wye Village Hall, Bridge St, Wye, Ashford TN25 5EA**