

DRAFT KCAF Meeting – Monday 6th September 2021
Meeting venue: Microsoft Teams
Meeting started at 2:00pm

Attendees:

Jeremy Boxall	J Box	Chair
Anne Rillie	AR	User representative – Equestrian
Amanda Corp	AC	Land Management Representative - NFU
Richard Dickenson	RD	User representative – Motorised vehicles
Robert Peel	RP	User representative – Walkers
Anne Beecham	AB	Other Interest Representative – Tourism
Theresa Trussell	TR	User representative – Multiuser
Sarah Barker	SB	Kent Association of Local Councils
Steve Neville	SN	User group – Cycling

Advisor

Graham Rusling	GR	KCC - PROW
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Minutes

Isabel Willson	IW	KCC
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Apologies:

Charles Tassell	CT	Land Management Representative – CLA
David Brazier	DB	KCC – Member
Hazel Walters	HW	KCC – Highways
Chris Jelly	CJ	Other Interest Representative – Dog Walking

Actions

1. GR to send SB the KCAF recruitment for advertising on the KALC website
2. Add Kent Design Guide to the next meeting agenda
3. SB to enquire about the levels of, and capacity of, Parish Councils to undertake maintenance work on PROW.
4. Add ROWIP item to the next meeting agenda

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the 7 June 2021 were approved subject to amendment:
 AB clarified that there is a lack of promoted equestrian routes on Explore Kent.
 Equestrian representatives were encouraged to identify equestrian routes, suitable for promotion, to Explore Kent.

Matters arising not on agenda

AB raised the issue of dead-end routes carrying higher rights.
 GR stated that these routes have been mapped and fall into a number of broad categories, many formerly having been recorded as Roads Used as Public Paths and subsequently restricted byways suggested that he meet with AB and Neil Barnes .
 TT said that she is hoping to have a list of these routes soon, which can be shared.

The decision to extend the current exception preventing access along the England Coast Path at Richborough Wharf was raised. Members had been given little time in which to respond. The lack of monitoring of the use of the site and the limited content in the Natural England report were highlighted. RP suggested monitoring in preparation for the for the next review of access at the site.

Membership

There has been no response from the social media advert created by Explore Kent, this advert will be reissued in the next few weeks.

GR suggested advertising externally. GR to confirm the advert wording with JBox.

SB offered to post the advert on the KALC website.

Countryside Code

Landowner guidance

NE are under obligation to produce and provide guidance for the public.

The summer campaign was released for the August bank holiday weekend. The campaign focussed on social media, principally targeting families and 16–24-year-olds.

NE are going to release Landowners' guidance which will cover several topics:

- Gaps, gates, and stiles (this is featured high up the list)
- Ensuring accessibility (Compliance)
- Guidance for landowners regarding safety, with livestock etc.
- Preventing trespass and managing and access in a way which is compliant.
- The creation of permissive access and what can be done to provide further access rights being established.

This is currently being drafted and it will be launched on the 20th of September 2021.

Development sites

Lower Thames Crossing

The latest consultation deadline is (WE 10/09/2021) .

RD will try send out a draft to the KCAF before the deadline.

DONE on the 8th September - copy to Jeremy, Anne B, Anne R and Graham R.

RD has drafted a response to this consultation. The response addresses – the project, its impact and mitigation proposals. A number of points were made:

- The detailing of access proposals on a number of plans makes it difficult to assess the proposals and impacts.
- There is an inconsistency in the labelling of access routes and their status.
- There is no study on the impact of the local roads and countryside access of people using the roads.
- There is a new open space at Chalk Park.
- Equestrian access had not been given full consideration. Hares Bridge had been “parked” in terms of equestrian access.
- Non-motorised user routes now have crossing points on local roads the use of which is expected to increase: this hadn't been mentioned.

RD will try send out a draft to the KCAF before the deadline.

AR confirmed that she had a team meeting with Ben Craggs, and she managed to get an understanding on what paths they think are bridle ways. AR has requested a consolidated map showing the access proposals. The BHS had provided a response to the consultation.

London Resort

The London Resort consultation response has been submitted. A number of points had been identified as requiring further information/ consideration including ecological mitigation and traffic impacts.

The decision by Natural England to extend the existing SSSI classification to most of the proposed development site. Although this won't necessarily stop development it will mean more will have to be done for nature conservation to mitigate and compensate for environmental losses.

Hoo Peninsula - Railway

There are proposals to dual the current Hoo Peninsula railway to the Isle of Grain to meet the needs of proposed housing growth in the area. This is likely to impact on a number of at-grade PRow and agricultural crossings of the railway. As well as the dualling of the railway lines a new station is to be built at Sharnel Street (Between High Halstow and Hoo).

High level policies

GR highlighted the severe pressure placed on the PRow and Access Service PRow as a result of the number of development, infrastructure and Local Development Plan consultations requiring detailed responses. The number of development sites requiring active management, in terms of PRow, was also placed a significant demand on the available Officer capacity. KCAF responses to high level development plans are extremely helpful in setting out the importance of PRow and access, appropriate protection of existing access and the provision of high quality access for future use.

Kent Design Guide

Kent Design guide was supposed to be updated at the end of 2019 and had been delayed due to COVID. GR to double check the current position. Kent Design Guide to be a future agenda item, allowing time for discussion.

Parish involvement in delivering improvements - maintenance

J Box introduced the topic of encouraging greater parish involvement in the maintenance of PRow. During lockdown there had been an increase in the use of PRow. This increase in use has declined since the relaxation of restrictions but remains higher than pre COVID levels. Some of the drop off in use may be due to ground conditions following wet weather, vegetation overgrowth and poorly maintained gates and stiles. This could be prevented by forming partnerships with parishes, ramblers, and landowners etc. Landowners should take on the responsibility of clearing their paths.

JBox suggested that walkers will generally take the easiest route; the route of less resistance. This can result in the establishment of alternative alignments and a reduction in use of the definitive alignment which is then not maintained. KCC have volunteers and they have had a parish partnership scheme in the past. The importance of general maintenance should be promoted more by the Forum.

SB stated that Wittersham Parish Council had trialled a council caretaker scheme. She suggested that this programme needs to be resurrected and can be promoted by KALC. GR stated that parishes do have powers under the Highways Act 1980, including section 43, and can undertake maintenance.

RD said that there are examples of parishes that maintain footpaths but only within their own parishes (Ditton is an example of this). RD commented on how he has seen PRow gradually become narrower over the last 25-30 years and understood that a management decision by KCC PRow meant cutting back of yearly growth was missed for several years around 2013. GC said that agricultural practice has changed in recent years, particularly the management of hedgerows with an impact on width.

GR responded that the ROWIP consultation had highlighted the importance of fulfilling the statutory duties to protect and maintain correctly. There had been a substantial budget cut in 2012 resulting in a reduction in the volume of vegetation clearance although this was now increasing year on year. GR encouraged all Forum members to report any overgrown PRow using the online fault reporting system: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/public-rights-of-way/report-a-problem-on-a-right-of-way>

On a positive note, though adding to the burden on PRow Officers the Service had secured £600K to address some of the damage resulting from high levels of use of the network during the lockdowns.

AR said that there used to be a scheme where landowners had to maintain the paths on their land. AR has asked GR if this rule still applies. GR said that Single Farm Payment does require a level of compliance and management in respect of visible PRow (those recorded on the Definitive Map)

although this may be subject to change on the introduction of the Environmental Land Management Scheme.

AB asked what the current state of the Countryside Access Warden scheme is? GR stated that this scheme is still up and running but not managed as actively in recent times following the loss of the volunteer management post. This has had a huge knock-on effect on the project because a PROW officer has had to pick up the role and work on this alongside their original role.

SB indicated that she was willing to enquire as to the level of Parish involvement/ activity through KALC.

ROWIP Projects - feasibility guidance

GR introduced the topic: Many parishes and communities have taken up the opportunity to produce Neighbourhood Plans. The plans often include proposals to improve access. Kent County Council Public Rights of Way and Access Service is simply not in a position to deliver the number of schemes identified either through Neighbourhood Plans or through the identification of projects by stakeholders.

GR suggested producing some guidance for the parishes and stakeholder groups, to empower them to deliver schemes or to do much of the required groundwork.

There are a number of challenges involved in the creation of any route:

Rationale - the business plan / demand for the route

The creation of rights by agreement, order or compulsory purchase.

Compensation

Funding

Constraints

Engineering and construction

Future management and ongoing costs.

TT stated that the BHS have attempted to work with the Kent Downs AONB on the Experience Project, but they are struggling to make progress. TT said that it would be nice to be more involved with this project.

GR suggested to carry this topic through to the next meeting agenda.

England Coast Path

The section of the ECP from London to Grain will formally be opened in January.

Kingsgate golf course has yet to be resolved. The alignment is settled but there are outstanding issues relating to the establishment work and fencing.

Most of the work is now underway on the remaining stretches with a small number of route alignment issues to be resolved. A Planning Inspector site visit to consider the remaining alignment issues is anticipated in the Autumn.

A "ghost" National Trail Partnership for the London to Brighton stretch of the ECP is being established.

Any other business

RP highlighted that the High Weald Walking Festival will be starting in a few weeks time

RD raised that the consultation for KCC budget (year 2022-23) is still open, and it closes on the 19th of September 2021. This can be found at letstalk.kent.gov.uk which lists all the consultations which are open at present.

Future meeting dates, times, and venues

Date: Monday 6th December 2021

Time: 2:00- 4:00pm

Venue: Virtual

The potential of an in-person Forum meeting was raised.

JBox suggested that if we have an appropriate venue then this can go ahead.

Future Dates:

JBox to circulate these with minutes.