

Meeting Minutes

Meeting: Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Joint Local Access Forum (DLAF)

Time: 10.00am to 1.00pm

Date: Thursday 25th July 2024

Venue: Hybrid meeting (Dorset Council Offices and Microsoft Teams)

Present:

DLAF Members

Philip Hackett (PH) (chair)
Janet Davis (JD) (vice chair)
Chris Slade (CS)

Paul Tomlinson (PT)
Mandy Willis (MW)
Nicola Harper (NH)

Fiona Bowles (FB)

Jan Wardell (JW) (previous DLAF member)

Local Authority Officers

Russell Goff DC (RG) (Greenspace Manager)
Graham Stanley DC (GS) (Senior Ranger)
David Ackerley DC (DA) (Senior Ranger)

Vanessa Penny DC (VP) (Definitive Map Manager)
Philip Elias BCP (PE) (Senior PRoW Officer)
Phoebe Watson DC (PW) (Business Support officer)
(notetaker)

Robert Greenhalgh (RGr) (Forestry Commission)
Sarah Warrener (SW) (Forestry Commission)
Roly Boughton (RB) (Forestry Commission)

Apologies:

Mandy Pfaff (MP)
Ellen House BCP (EH)
Andy Brown BCP (AB)

Agenda Items:

1. Welcome/introductions, apologies & declaration of interests

- Apologies were received from MP, EH & AB. Declarations of interest (DOIs) will be made at the time of each agenda item.

2. Chance for Public Questions

- No public questions received.

3. Minutes of the last meeting, actions and matters arising

- Minutes of the last meeting (Monday 8th April 2024) were unanimously confirmed as a true record of the last meeting.

Actions:

- 3.1** All update email address to ensure they have corrected email address for MW sent by JD. GS to update group email for future meetings.
- 3.2** PH and JD to contact absent members of LAF to check if they wish to continue involvement.
- 3.3** GS to check if bridge raised by NH is DDA compliant. The bridge mentioned has steps and is narrow. GS to contact NH and check this from last meeting's minutes.

3.4 GS to follow up with RQ re Dorset Explorer point from last meeting's minutes.

3.5 FB to circulate document on ELMs payments available if not sent already.

4. Presentation by Forestry Commission Colleagues - Rob Greenhalgh (East Dorset Woodland Officer), Roly Boughton (Woodland Officer) and Sarah Warrener (Land Use Advisor).

Please double click this image to open the PowerPoint presentation by the Forestry Commission Team. →



- Grants for Woodland Creation - SW
 - 2 main grants – Woodland Creation Planning Grant and England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO).
- Case Study – RB
 - This case is located just outside Bridport, where the agent came to him wanting to create 6h/a of woodland to give something back community.
 - Map shows diagram and plans for site highlighting open space, ride system, wetland trees etc.
 - Compartment 1 and compartment 3 will be extensive walks with works due to start this autumn.
 - RG advises that Dorset Council is landowner between compartments 3 and 4. RG would be happy to have a chat with landowners and Forestry Commission about how Dorset Council can increase access onto new piece of land.
 - FB suggests this information would be helpful to have on Magic Map as this is used by landowners.
 - Query from PH - **What consideration do you have to promote equestrian access? Is there a possibility to link into bridleways to allow equestrian access?** RGr advises it would be more appropriate to have that discussion with someone from Forestry England as promoting access would fall more under their under as they cover access, recreation, wellbeing opportunities etc.
 - PT queries about this information going on Dorset Explorer. SW advises the issue with that is information staying available to the public once it's outdated. RG advises Dorset Explorer could have this information on there as it can be reviewed as often as necessary and then is up to Dorset Council to contact Forestry Commission or landowners to check status.
 - NH advises that Magic may not be as useful due to layers being removed.
- Countryside Stewardship and Existing Woodlands - RGr
 - This scheme is for existing woodlands that public already use.
 - Landowners must have Woodland Management Plan in place already to then qualify for WD2 Improvements payments. This a general payment for improve existing woodland.
 - Land Information Search can be found on google.
 - Query from RG - **are you proactively asking landowners to open these woodlands up to public or is it a case of landowners approaching Forestry Commission?** RGr advises they can do so much suggesting but inevitably comes down to landowner. RB advises a lot of conversations start by landowners wanting to generate income from their woodlands.

Actions:

4.1 RG look at promoting conversations with landowners to open their woodlands at future Senior Ranger Meetings.

5. Dorset Council Greenspace Management & Maintenance – Russell Goff (Greenspace Manager)

- Department lucky this year with bridge budget. Mentioned during last DLAF that £160K they get every year has been given again this year to build new bridges across the county and improve ones that have been damaged over bad winter.
- Stats - typical May into June. Catching up with backlog in July as result of very late growth year. Last quarter we received 1363 job reports from public, most of which were in relation to cutbacks of vegetation and overgrowth.
- Mentioned in last meeting that more staff were joining team via apprenticeship scheme. RG happy to confirm most of those boots are now on the ground which is massive benefit to the team.
- ROWIP
 - Timeline on website is accurate (currently in early stages of being written. Will go out for consultation to public to be published in 2025) The LAF will be brought in for consultation as key part in first draft.
- Senior Ranger Officer Report – Graham Stanley (Senior Ranger)
 - **West/Stuart Semple's Area** - Currently working on surfacing on coast path at Fleet and installing gates on rights of way at Tidmoor. Also working on replacing bridge near Shipton and two bridges on Jubilee Way at Stoke Abbot. Investigation works into gas main on proposed bridleway at Chiddeock are also ongoing.
 - **Purbeck/Katie Black's Area** – Currently facing issues with coast path disappearing into sea and requiring new fencing, as well as replacement and removal works, to push the path back into fields and be made safe again. Katie is in process of agreeing New England Coast Path Route through Lulworth to avoid firing ranges. Diversion of coast path at Houns-Tout due to landslip is underway with 3 mile diversion due to closure. Several bridges out on public rights of way being replaced this year with help of budget increase. Also working on improvements on Priest Way path through CIL funding.
 - **East/Ben Wallbridge & Sophie Isaac's Area** - Have been dealing with the Alderholt planning enquiry for 1,700 new homes. Hoping to get decent amount of funding to improve public rights of way in that area. Also working on bridge replacements and works on Castleman Trailway dealing with badger set issues.
 - **Central/Dave Ackerly's Area** – Working on Piddle Valley surfacing project and another at Radipole Lake. Also currently working on improvement of visitor experience at high angle batteries on Portland as well as more bridge replacements. Some dealings of issues in Minterne Magna, working with landowners to reopen footpaths.
 - **North/Graham Stanley's Area** – More bridge replacements underway across North Dorset. Also carrying out resurfacing works on North Dorset Trailway and footpath work in Winterborne Whitechurch. Also going to be resurfacing North Dorset Trailway in Stalbridge. Currently dealing with ploughing and cropping issues. GS thinks it may be good for LAF to get involved and perhaps put article in local press to make it clear to landowners what their responsibilities are. GS is in the early draft of working on developer guidance note to give out to housing developers. Rangers are also looking at revamping enforcement letters so there's a greater level of consistent information being given out to landowners across county.
- Key bridge replacement to note is Dorchester, Three Bears Cottage, bridle way where river Frome washed out bridge and path. Rangers have been successful in getting some level up funding for this. Works will be completed by end of September to improve bridleway.
- PH would like to pay thanks to GS and team for the fantastic works carried out on Darknoll Lane.

Actions:

- 5.1** RG look into mapping exercise accessibility for ROWIP as requested by FB. Will take this away and liaise with the team responsible.

5.2 RG share working draft of ROWIP with DLAF early September when available.

6. BCP Council Greenspace Management & Maintenance – Philip Elias (Senior Rights of Way Officer)

- News/Staff Update
 - New leader of BCP Council is now Cllr Millie Earl after Cllr Vicki Slade recently left role as leader of council.
 - Cllr Andy Hadley remains as portfolio holder for this area.
 - Ellen House has sadly left team. This is now a vacant position currently in advertising process. Hopefully position will be filled in autumn.
- Canford School Diversion Project
 - This project fell by wayside some years ago, but Candford School would still like to see diversion put in place. Applying under Section 119b on grounds of a significant amount of anti-social behaviour and crime.
 - Have been conducting some internal consultations with stakeholders and safeguarding teams. Now in talks with police to see if crime level and ASB is high enough to warrant need for diversion.
 - Further investigations underway.
- Parley Golf Enforcement
 - Drainage culvert has been completely filled in so planning enforcement will now be involved.
 - PE imagines this will result in full roll back of development and restoration of path as it was before.
 - Several planning reasons why this development can't go ahead.
- Stour Valley Project
 - Project ongoing. Mix of major and minor works still to be done.
 - One key point PE currently into is river crossings to get certain areas of Stour Valley connected. Looking into various improvements.
 - Existing SANG lacks connection to Dorset side so ideas are being drawn for this. Looking into upgrading Footpath 29 to bridleway. Also marked out areas that may come up for development which would create new paths to link up areas.
 - Currently looking at CIL funding of roughly £7.5 million to bid for, with internal meetings discussing how this would be allocated. Emphasis seems to be placed on maintenance of existing structures e.g. Poole lifting bridge.
 - Looking at replacing full system of signage at Stour Valley. A lot of directional wooden signs are coming up to end of natural life span. PE would like to see completely new set of signage along route.
 - PE has been talking to Katherine Church at National Trust about progression of project. Katherine showed PE early draft of signage and branding. PE pleased with drafts. Still early days but positive start.
 - Drafting more detailed bids for other, more ambitious projects.
- Castleman Trailway
 - Talked about creation of new set of equestrian compliant steps onto trailway as part of CIL meeting. This is item that PE believes will be taken ahead.
 - Also going to be doing surfacing improvements.
- Avon Valley Path
 - Currently focusing on flooding issues.
 - PE in talks with Meyrick Estate Management who will hopefully share plan soon regarding possible installation of new path.
 - Meyrick Estate Management working on plans to create wetland ecology area and fitting in paths where possible. Once PE has information, will share with DLAF.
- PH welcomes proposal of new bridge in the Stour Valley Project and would like to promote this for multi-use.

Actions:

- 6.1 PE advise where CIL funding will be allocated at next meeting.
- 6.2 PE look into timeline for delivery of BCP's ROWIP as requested by PT.

**7. Legal Record Team - Definitive Map & Statement – Vanessa Penny (Definitive Map Manager).
Presentation (latest path order statistics)**

- News/Staff Update
 - Implementation of Deregulation Act - recently been advised that there is a recruitment freeze at DEFRA. Lead officer for Rights of Way Reform Package left earlier this year and position has not been filled so currently no one leading on project.
 - Definitive Map Team were struggling with recruitment due to staff member leaving end of last year who was replaced internally. Advertised for new Definitive Map assistant which has been appointed. New starter will join in September.
 - Public Enquiry Update – Scheduled for Tuesday 10th December relating to old DMMO claim at Bradford Abbas. Struggling to find venue with places being booked up for Christmas events. May need to be held at County Hall if no other option but will continue to look.
- Cases
 - Currently 240 DMMO cases not started. Rate of influx has almost stopped so back to pre-BHS project levels. These figures haven't changed much since last report. 48 cases in progress.
 - Of cases not started, majority are BHS project cases. Can't start to investigate these yet as landowner has not formally been notified.
 - Of the cases in progress, 4 are currently with planning inspectorate.
 - 29 cases in queue waiting to be submitted to PINS which VP and team are working on.
 - Public Path Orders – Still up to date with 4 cases not started and 35 cases in progress, 11 of which are Town and Country Planning Act applications. 5 of the 35 cases have orders made and are awaiting works before confirmation. 3 have confirmed orders which are awaiting works before they come into operation.
 - Currently have 1 PPO case with planning inspectorate which is footpath 51 Dorchester and footpath 6 Winterborne Monkton.
 - Recently received interim decision to confirm with modifications which will be advertised by planning inspectorate shortly.
 - 2 other PPO cases still waiting for submission to PINS.
- Access to Longham Lakes – Mandy Willis (MW)
 - Access to Longham Lakes by Longham bridge is very dangerous place to cross the road and access site. Recent issues with access being blocked off by other members of public.
 - VP advises application backlog is still a complication with potentially a few years before this could be looked at. Team are doing best they can but VP appreciates this is not satisfactory.
 - MW spoken to Chris Chope (MP for Christchurch) who was unaware of Definitive Map backlogs at Dorset Council.
 - GS has spoken to East Team after receiving report. Sophie is aware of vegetation issues and will get to them as soon as possible. Will also look at swapping existing stiles for gates for easier access and make what improvements she can. Will also approach people that manage the Lakes again to discuss general maintenance etc.
 - MW advises main access to Lakes is footway that comes out onto Ringwood Road with no dropped kerb and is on a very dangerous bend.
 - Query from PH – **do you feel the statement of priorities is fit for purpose or is this something that could be looked at?** VP advises the statement of priorities was revised last year. Top of list are applications that are mainly supported by user evidence which may be affected by lengthy

delays. There are several longstanding applications in queue which are equally important. Moved it up list as far as possible but still likely to be a few years before they can get to it.

- PT suggests writing letter to portfolio holder to emphasize impact on community and ask for reassurance that VP's team will be provided with resources needed to process applications within realistic timescale.
- JD advises this is a national issue as Deregulation Act was passed in 2015 but DEFRA has given it such low priority that even now those provisions still haven't been activated.
- VP advises Councillor Shane Bartlett is portfolio holder who has been on Rights of Way Regulatory committees for number of years. He is aware of situation, but VP suggests it would be helpful for LAF to raise issue with new councillors.

Actions:

7.1 PT to find old letter so that it can be used in preparing a letter for the Chairman to send to the new portfolio holder. New portfolio holder to be invited to the next LAF meeting.

8. Member Feedback from Associated Groups/Meetings

- Dorset National Landscape – JD
 - Since last DLAF meeting, JD has been to meeting of Dorset National Landscape Management Board representing LAF.
 - Huge number of good projects going on. Some are access related, particularly stepping into nature projects, however these are temporarily on hold as they've come to end of current funding round.
- Local Nature Partnership (LNP) – FB
- Last meeting was quite short with nothing of much relevance except Local Nature Recovery Scheme is progressing, with new farm cluster projects which have gathered good funding and opportunities for access. FB suggests LAF write a brief introduction to new organisations involved to highlight access opportunities.
- FB talking to National Trust as they've done big schemes on other estates to put permissive access routes in. FB thinks there is an open door with Purbeck. No current link between LAF and Purbeck Active Transport Group. Fiona will sit on meeting to link with them.

Actions:

8.1 JD send link so DLAF can read about Dorset National Landscape projects.

8.2 FB and JD draft introduction letter to new organisations involved in Local Nature Partnership.

9. Ratifications:

- Response to BCP Local Plan
 - Were unable to circulate NH's response to BCP Local plan in time for today's meeting so will ratify that next time.
 - Janet had email from BCP to say Local Plan is at stage where it has now gone to Secretary of State for examination. Predict this will take 12 months and will be able to adopt in 2025.
- SANG Query – MW
 - MW noticed issue with SANG's that we have locally, particularly issues with access to highway.
 - Example - Big development at Ferndown that went in a few years ago called Holmwood Park. SANG went in as part of development with car park off Christchurch Road, but no pedestrian access built in. This is very dangerous for people looking to access SANG. **Should local plans be picking up that SANG's should allow recreational access from the highway etc?**

- Another example – SANG at Canford Park. MW believes this is managed privately. This means no way for public to have any sort of say as to what goes on there. MW has not had response to her queries from the owners.
- GS advises that he will be asking Rangers that look after Dorset Council SANG's to attend next meeting.

Actions:

9.1 NH send link to LAF with Natural England SANG information and guidance for local authorities.

9.2 RG speak to highways colleagues about access off Christchurch Road

9.3 RG discuss access improvements with Jade North and Sophie Isaacs.

9.4 GS invite DC Rangers to next meeting to discuss SANG's.

10. Planning Applications: validation check list.

- JD suggests LAF write to planning department at Dorset Council and ask if they can amend validation checklist for planning applications and move requirements to depict public rights of way from voluntary list to required list.
- Current wording is very subjective for Developers when they submit plans.

Actions:

10.1 JD draft letter to Planning Department.

11. A.O.B

- JD received consultation on travel plan monitoring fees from BCP. After inspection, JD could not see anything LAF needed to comment on.
- CS submitted question before meeting - ***there are suggestions in the media that the government intends to introduce a Right to Roam in England, as they have in Scotland. If so, how will that effect our rights of way, their maintenance, improvement and legal processes?*** JD advises Labour party's manifesto didn't say anything about introducing Right to Roam in England. Just had small section mentioning access declaring 9 new national river walks and establishing 3 new forests in England. Ramblers is not pressing for right to roam in England as there are many barriers that would impact rights of way network.

12. Date of next meeting.

Next meeting to be held on 28th of November, 10am at County Hall.

Meeting closed at 13:10.