

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

First meeting of 2016/17
Countryside Offices, Signal Court, Old Station Way, EYNSHAM, SP3 5JN
Tuesday 26 April 2016
10am - 12.30pm

A G E N D A 2016 (1)

	Item	<i>Coffee/tea available from 09.45am</i>
10.00	1	Welcome. Annual election/re-election of Chair and Vice-chair
	2	Apologies for absence and declarations of interest - to declare any personal or prejudicial interests
	3	Confirm the minutes of 19 January 2016 (2015/3)
10.15	4	Matters arising from minutes of 19 January
10.25	5	Parishes and planning
10.35	6	Local Enterprise Partnership - Dawn Pettis from Oxfordshire County Council
11.00	7	Sharing Papers with Monitoring Group and discussion item re fencing of public rights of way
11.20	8	Proposed amendment to OCAF Terms of Reference re membership terminations
		<i>Comfort break</i>
11.30	9	Rights of Way Management Plan delivery/priority caseload approach
12.00	10	Countryside Access Team update
12.15	11	Questions from members of public/observers
	12	Agree date, time and location of future meetings to link in with Monitoring Group – September 2016? Tues 1 st November 2016 and Tues 18 th April 2017–plus possible summer site visits 2016?

n.b. all times are indicative only

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum is a Local Access Forum - an independent advisory body, established and administered by Oxfordshire County Council to assist with improving access to Oxfordshire's countryside under s94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Contact any member via the OCAF Secretariat: Oxfordshire County Council, Countryside Service, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, Oxford OX29 4TL. Tel 01865 810226, email: countryside@oxfordshire.gov.uk or visit www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE THIRD MEETING OF 2015/16
Tuesday 19th January 2016, County Hall, Oxford

2015 (3)

Attending:

Members and their Interest areas:

Troth Wells, Chair (TW) – Equestrians
Stuart McGinness, Vice-chair (SMG) User – Off-road cycling and cycle training
Sarah Martin (SM) – User – Walking and botany, permissive access
Dave Cavanagh (DC) – User – Walking and practical voluntary action on paths
Nigel Fisher (NF) – Landowner – Estate management and conservation research
Andrew Hawkins (AH) – Landmanaging – Small woodland management
Harry St John (HSJ) – Landmanaging – Land agent
Gordon Garraway (GG) - Other – Green space protection and recreational trails

Observers:

Chris Marriage (CM) - Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum
Chris Blomfield (CB) and Ian Clark (IC) – Motorcycle interest and potential OCAF applicants

Oxfordshire County Council Officers attending to support OCAF

Hugh Potter – OCC Countryside and Records Manager (HP)
Jackie Smith – OCC Assistant Rights of Way Field Officer
Paul Harris – OCAF Secretary/ OCC Countryside Access Team Leader (Acting)(PH)

1. Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest

TW welcomed all present to the meeting and introductions were made. PH informed the group that apologies had been received from Cllr Rodney Rose, Cllr David Nimmo-Smith, Anne Luttman-Johnson, Matthew Judson, Philip Chamberlain, Christopher Gowers, John Griffin.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Confirm the minutes of 22nd Sept 2015: Confirmed

3. Matters Arising

2015(2)3 – New Countryside Stewardship Scheme. HSJ and NF explained that the new Stewardship Scheme offered very little direct incentive for farmers to provide permissive access as there were no specific revenue payments. The new scheme was points based and competitive. This would mean that existing permissive access would be deleted from the Defra website and unavailable to members of the public unless the parish council or local community negotiated some sort of extension with the farmer directly. CM confirmed that there were 11 such agreements in West Berkshire compared to 50 across Oxfordshire. PH added that he intended to try and secure the replacement of the access land permissive links with dedicated access land strips but there was no funding available. HSJ suggested that Natural England was invited to the next meeting of OCAF.

Action 1: PH to invite Angella Hennell from Natural England, or a suitable colleague, to the next OCAF meeting to discuss options for existing permissive access schemes.

2015(2)6 - Countryside Access Team and Development: TW highlighted that she still had issues and concerns about CA Team's work around planning applications, while understanding the pressures that the team is under. In the specific case of the new Chilton A34 slip roads she informed the group that a stay of judgement had been achieved so that more consideration of equestrian needs could be made. The route is a major equestrian link and is currently under threat due to the Chilton lack of a suitable crossing. The British Horse Society have been doing all they can to keep this link open for equestrians. She urged other OCAF members to share the burden of vigilance and help to support the CA Team where developments threaten RoW.

2015(2)3 - Monitoring Group: PH confirmed that the Rights of Way Monitoring Group will be carrying on and is not under any threat.

PH advised the group that James Blockley will be joining the team on Monday 14th March as the new Countryside Access Team Leader.

4. OCAF's views on Countryside Access operational Issues

PH introduced the agenda item and summarised key points from the paper. He invited comments and suggestions but stressed that this was just an early opportunity to make comments. HP added that access had impacts at the last round of cuts but the outlook now was much more challenging. The county council faced immense cuts and access could not be immune from these. He said that OCAF would be kept informed once more detail was known.

SMG asked if the focus would be on statutory duties. HP said that this was likely but in the case of rights of way the level of the statutory duty wasn't clearly established and some may regard access as a discretionary.

HSJ asked about the opportunities afforded by the Community Infrastructure Levy especially as substantial growth is expected over the next 20 to 30 years. He added that CIL should kick in in April and asked if the county get to share it. PH responded that the county council should receive some but it is the district councils which have to allocate it and any funds for county will usually go to highways, education, social services infrastructure first. Section 106 (Town and Country Planning Act 1990) planning agreements were still possible and were a better option on sites with access issues directly related to that site, and he gave the example of the £200k available for access measures around Ardley Energy from Waste site. Parish and town councils with Neighbourhood Plans would have more money allocated to them and it would be good to increase the message about the potential for improvements to be shared more with parishes to encourage them to take action. HSJ suggested that he could assist OCAF write to the parish councils and that some devolution may be a good idea.

GG said that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) allocated grants to support the economy and he had followed this up after reading about the role of LEPs in the LAF newsletter. He had found out that cycling has received £3m for Oxford City and £3m for the Eco-Town. He questioned how they operate and their membership. DC and PH said that their membership was wide and included the county councils and district councils. GG said he felt access schemes could help with the aim of LEPS in growing the local economy. HP clarified that the Oxford scheme includes £300,000 investment on the Thames tow path from Folly Bridge to Iffley lock. He also highlighted the 'Oxfordshire Together' approach where local communities are being encouraged to club together to deliver some highways services.

SM asked if European money could be available. HSJ and PH mentioned the LEADER programme which was active across Oxfordshire. TW added that this may be a something Hilary Phillips from Wild Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership may be able to give more detail about. PH read out parts of the LEP's strategy document 'The Oxfordshire Strategic Environmental Economic Investment Plan' (SEEIP) which is intended to provide direction and clarity on how investment in the Oxfordshire's environment will be delivered [www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/content/seeip]. PH read out three of the priorities in the SEEIP which he felt were directly relevant to OCAF's work. 1) Promoting and enabling access to Oxfordshire's countryside, the River Thames and its tributaries, wildlife and heritage assets to attract and benefit residents, businesses and visitors: 2) Improving the setting of new and existing development and heritage assets by investing in strategic green infrastructure, including public open space, habitats, sustainable drainage systems, and walking and cycling connections: 3) Engaging people in their environment and encouraging more sustainable lifestyles

TW said that objective 5 (working with planning process) was very important too as CAT nearly always seemed to be sidelined and it was important to be vigilant. HP had been involved some time back and was now making certain that OCC fully understood the issues and that people learnt from these. TW added that one problem was that district councils didn't consider the needs of equestrians and she thanked HP for his efforts. HSJ said that for major schemes the district and county councils had shopping lists of needs and that local people needed to be more vigilant on sites with clear planning potential and get involved before applications are made so that their needs could get on to the list and into the 'heads of terms'. CM agreed and gave an example that in Reading where horse riders spotted a planning application for 3,000 houses and they made successful representations showing the impact on users and the value and the list of bridleways affected. HSJ added that until planning consent was granted a developer cannot do anything so until then there is more room for negotiation. This should form part of the advice letter to parishes. NF expressed caution about an avalanche of work being expected from local councils

Action 2: HSJ and PH to draft a letter to local councils re considering access issues as part of local responses to planning applications.

Action 3: PH to ask Hilary Philips from Local Nature Partnership to attend a future meeting to help discuss the Local Enterprise Partnership

5. Ramblers Big Path Watch

PH advised members that The Ramblers' Big Path Watch had finished collecting data. The Countryside Access (CA) Team had mixed views of the detail and quality of the reports supplied, but it did seem that the scheme had good levels of participation. As with most other authorities the CA Team only skimmed off the higher priority issues to investigate and wasn't able to process any of the lower priority reports. The Ramblers would be coming out with a campaign and PH said that he hoped that it was a positive one. DC added that the Oxfordshire Ramblers' Committee were making use of the reports and considering action. He also hoped the campaign would be a positive one but a 'dirty-dozen' worst authorities was likely too. SM gave an example of the Ramblers' response to her report about a cropping issue and PH confirmed that his team did not send out sarcastic response letters to reportees and that this response had actually come from another Rambler. He added that the CA Team sends out a cropping letter to in autumn and spring to remind and encourage farmers and landowners to avoid disturbing paths and to reinstate correctly and within the timescales. CM said that in West Berks the drilled winter wheat crops are left to grow until the line of the path can be mowed out.

6. Parish Path Warden (PPW) Scheme

PH gave a brief update about the scheme in Oxfordshire after the annual liaison meeting earlier that week. He said that the scheme is going well with around 80% of parishes covered including Chilterns Society and Cotswolds Wardens. The scheme's coordinator is trying to recruit in the gap areas. An identity/authority card has been drafted up to show under what authority PPWs are working under. The PPWs also seem to like the new web based reporting system and will be trying to train each other to use this. DC added that it wasn't necessary to be a member of the Ramblers' to be a PPW and you'd still be covered by their insurance. CM asked if the parish council had to authorise the PPW for its area. PH said that no, the PPW was separate to the parish council although of course the council could allocate one of its members to be the PPW. AH asked if lines of communication and operation were clear. DC confirmed that there was a good handbook that had been put together with OCC and the scheme was working really well.

7. Proposed amendment to OCAF Terms of Reference re membership terminations

PH introduced the item and highlighted key points in the paper including the two possible actions to have the Chair contact members who haven't attended for a while, and also to adjust the OCAF terms of reference. TW said that it is hard for members to commit themselves as they are all volunteers, and that OCAF need an active group of members, but there was no intention to push people out. PH said that OCAF can seek more members as currently there are 14 members and there can be up to 22. It was suggested that it may be worth members inviting a replacement as an observer and possibly inviting someone representing district councils. PH pointed out that it is the individual that is the member rather than the organisation, but that there was no reason why an organisation couldn't send an observer to the meeting. He added that another way to get members along may be to change some meetings to the evening to allow other members to attend. TW agreed to try this and suggested that the April meeting was at County Hall and the September/October meeting was held in the evening at Eynsham.

8. Forward Planning

TW suggested that planning applications should feature and that OCC staff could look at the OCC and district council websites for the consultations and send key ones through to OCAF. PH said that he could not commit the CA Team to doing this for OCAF or even sending application information through as there was simply too much. He advised that for major planning applications with hundreds of documents, most relevant information could be found in the 'non-technical summary' [of the Environmental Impact Assessment] and the 'planning statement' as these contain key details and plans which are very helpful to check whether any PRoW are affected. DC said that he checked all planning applications in the Vale on behalf of the Ramblers. He responds about once a month as only a small number seem to affect PRoW.

CM said that his LAF was concerned about the railway electrification gantries for the West Berks/Goring area and he wanted to bring an update to a future meeting. He added that his LAF were to hold a special meeting with the Canal and River Trust about their work with towpath footpaths.

NF asked if OCC CA Team could bring examples of planning applications where improvements and mitigations to access had been requested. He suggested Eynsham but any area where the process flow would be appreciated. For Eynsham he suggested that

an update by Ian Leggett from the cycle path/Restricted Byway campaign scheme would be useful.

Action 4: PH to add agenda item about planning process to the next available meeting.

9. Agree Date of Next Meeting

April 26th meeting confirmed for 10am. Autumn meeting scheduled for 4th Oct at 5.30pm at Signal Court, Eynsham.

10. Questions from members and members of public/observers

AH asked if anything been discussed regarding the conflict with cyclists, particularly in the Chilterns. PH replied that this was discussed in the Monitoring group meeting and that the Cycle Touring Club (CTC) had issued a written response after the meeting. He added that the issue was still there and it was now up to organisations to take action. SMG said that The PRoW network was fragmented and the Strava app showed this. He understood that alternative routes would be being looked at as a few connections would improve the network. SM also offered to ask her family member to get a young person's perspective on riding in the area. CM suggested that an engineered approach could work in some areas to minimise impacts. AH said that it was a shame that a few spoil it for the majority. PH suggested that he may be able to see if the National Trust wanted to speak about their cycle proposal at Faringdon and SMG referred to the £50k that British Cycling was offering for a dedicated off road facility in the area.

HP referred to the recent budget consultation and said that the PRoW issue was third out of 27 suggestions for the department and he thanked those members who had made positive responses.

CB raised the High Speed 2 rail link and asked how it affects Oxfordshire. HP advised that although a small number of PRoW most of them were bridleways so there would be an impact which the CA Team were liaising about. CB also asked about the byway incorrectly shown as a restricted byway on a planning application. CB also asked about the long term closure at Marcham Rushey Mill. PH advised him that the CA Team were working with bridge engineers to look at options for next stages.

Action 5: PH to circulate CTC's detailed response to the Chiltern Society paper on cycling on footpaths

With no additional questions the meeting closed at 12.10pm

Signed as correct

Stuart McGinness, OCAF Chair

26th April 2016

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 3

Date: 26th April 2016
Title: Matters Arising - Permissive path agreements under Higher Level Stewardship and role of Natural England
Author: Paul Harris, OCAF Secretariat

Introduction

At the last OCAF meeting of 19th January 2016, there was an action for the Secretary to seek Natural England's attendance at the meeting to discuss what happens to permissive access created under Higher Level Stewardship and access matters generally

Unfortunately the Natural England Officer covering the OCAF area is unable to normally attend OCAF meetings but she did seek clarification from colleagues and has provided the attached information.

OCAF Action

Members to note the information about permissive access and Natural England's role in access.

From: Hennell, Angela M (NE)
Sent: 23 March 2016 09:00
To: Harris, Paul - E&E
Cc: Muldal, Alison (NE); Morris, Robert (NE)

Subject: Oxfordshire Local Access Forum - request for NE/Defra officer at next meeting (April 26th) to talk about Stewardship Scheme and permissive access

Dear Paul

I refer to your email informing me that the Oxfordshire Local Access Forum (OCAF) discussed the lack of specific financial incentive for access in the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) as well as how this new scheme will impact on the 50 or so active permissive access agreements across Oxfordshire that are currently working to their end dates in their January meeting.

You have asked me to attend your next meeting on April 26th " to talk about how to retain permissive access and how the new CSS could benefit local communities in terms of providing for access. Another aspect is how NE or Defra could support Access Authorities to 'convert' existing permissive agreements under HLS that connect Access Land areas into dedicated strips of Access Land in order to protect and guarantee public access. You may recall that Oxfordshire originally negotiated these permissive links for around 8 parcels of Access Land and these are our priority to secure a solution. You may also recall that using the Access Management Grant Scheme OCC did achieve one such negotiation at Gatehampton near Goring some years ago which cost £12k but has secured a link between two parcels of Access Land in perpetuity, thus increasing this land's utility and use. "

We have been in contact several times this year and I confirmed that unfortunately I couldn't attend your meeting on this occasion but was very happy to gather some useful information for you to share with your LAF colleagues and you agreed you could then circulate this information.

In short, there is no specific funding or mechanism to encourage farmers to continue providing permissive access in any of the Countryside Stewardship grants this time. A Defra commissioned study in 2014 indicated that many would still consider carrying it on, even without payment, and it's something we want to suggest to agreement holders when agreements with permissive access are expiring. However, after the cessation of an agreement, it's out of our hands and any continued provision would probably need the involvement of the local rights of way section to advise on either avoiding dedication, (or conversely going down that route) and other issues such as public liability.

It is important to note that the removal of the funding for permissive access was a Defra Ministerial decision and not a Natural England one.

I know that various rights of way officers are liaising with landowners about this It's also something some LAFs have indicated an interest in i.e. encouraging farmers to continue with their provision. Unfortunately there's no funding for open access either but there is a simple mechanism that land owners can use to dedicate land for

access under s16 of the Countryside Right of Way Act. For Oxfordshire, Rob Morris is the case officer who can advise if necessary.

I attach some Natural England Guidance above on considering with access after an agreement has ended.

NE support for access in the future

Whilst we do not have a specific grants programme we will continue to be involved with a range of supportive activities e.g. our input to the Deregulation Act implementation, looking at ways of facilitating volunteers/LAFs in advance of the 2026 cut-off date, working with stakeholders via national forums and user groups to promote the benefits of public access/recreation, running specific projects to benefit public access, for example last year's bridle-gate trial to inform the revision of British Standard 5709 (for gaps gates and stiles, and of course our supporting role with LAFs themselves.

Not to forget about the coastal path and our continued involvement with national trails.

I hope this helps and that your meeting goes well and I hope you have a good Easter break.

Kindest regards
Angela

GUIDANCE ON CONTINUING TO PROVIDE PERMISSIVE ACCESS ON TERMINATION OF AN AGRI-ENVIRONMENT AGREEMENT

Permissive access revenue payments cannot be included in new HLS agreements. This means when an agri-environment agreement ends which contained revenue payments for permissive access, the agreement holder will not be able to receive further permissive access revenue payments through any subsequent Higher Level Stewardship agreement. Where the provision of permissive linear routes or open access under an agri-environment scheme has proved to be of public benefit then Natural England and Defra are keen that permissive access should continue on a voluntary basis.

If the agreement holder is willing to consider allowing voluntary permissive access a number of factors should be considered before they agree to this happening.

1. The agreement holder/land occupier is encouraged to seek professional advice which is available from their local authority Access officers, or from their own solicitors, before permitting the public to have access to land.
2. Where a tenancy is involved, tenants and landlords are advised to discuss the provision of permissive access with each other to ensure that each party is aware of the implications or provision and has taken the appropriate advice.
3. Public liability insurance. Although land occupiers (owner/occupiers and tenants) are required to carry third party insurance against the risks of injury to anyone coming onto the land they occupy, they should inform their insurer that they are allowing permissive public access to their land.

4. The agreement holder/land occupier should be aware of any health and safety implications on the routes/land and carry out an appropriate risk assessment.
5. Appropriate notices should be posted (and maintained) at all entry and exit points, explaining that the access is permissive by nature and can be closed at any time, without notice. It is strongly recommended that advice should be sought on the precise wording of such notices, by talking to the local authority Access Officer. Members of the public may try to claim that the route has become dedicated as a Public Right of Way by virtue of long use, such notices guard against this.

These notices should ideally contain a map showing the permissive route/area. They should be photographed (giving a clear indication of the date) at the time of installation to guard against future removal. A copy of the notice should also be sent by registered post to the local Highway Authority at the local council.

6. Agreement holders/land occupiers are also advised to follow the statutory procedure under section 31(6) of the Highways Act 1980. This entails submitting a map and declaration to the Highway Authority to prevent permissive access being dedicated as public rights of way. Guidance may be found at www.iprow.co.uk/docs/uploads/pgn2.doc The local Highway Authority may also be able to help with signage and route promotion.
7. Where an agreement holder is hoping to renew the rest of the agreement under a new Higher Level Stewardship agreement, Defra has asked that the continuation of well used voluntary permissive access be taken into account by Natural England when assessing the application.
8. If access is not going to continue good practice would be for the agreement holder to give members of the public some advance warning of this.

A suggested form of words is:

“The agreement that existed to provide permissive access has now run out/will expire on XXX. From this date there is no permissive access along this route or over this area. Along with the statutory rights of way network, other permissive sites may be available in the local area. Please visit <http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk/> for details of other permissive routes.”

Agreement holders may also consider informing the local parish council who may be able to help explain to local people that the route is closing/has closed.

Natural England Standard

Access: why we do what we do



1:0 An introduction

Strategic standards for 'why we do what we do'

We have a set of standards for 'why we do what we do' for each of the main areas of our work where we help deliver environmental outcomes. These are: Access, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ecosystem Approach, Engagement, Landscape, Land Management, Land use and Marine. They describe the relevant legislation and Government policy, our role, and the principles that we apply to our work.

The standards are for all our staff and will provide:

- a common framework to help us work more consistently
- a coherent picture of our role, Government policy and how we deliver for the natural environment, people and places
- a clearer and shared understanding of our role as a science-led, impartial delivery body
- our customers with a better understanding of what we do and why.

A number of common themes are listed below which run through the principles in the standards. As such they illustrate key attributes that will be evident across our work and our contribution to national and local priorities.

1. Gathering, interpreting and providing evidence and information that those making decisions and choices need.
2. Practical advice that helps secure a high quality and diverse natural environment, which provides services of benefit to people and the economy and is resilient to climate change.
3. Enabling and supporting people to act for and engage with the natural environment.
4. Ensuring that the natural environment contributes to green growth and quality of life.
5. Working with and through others.
6. Responsive to local circumstances and customer needs.

2:0 Access strategic standard - definition and scope

The term *access* encompasses open-air recreation, including walking, cycling, horse riding and canoeing. It covers facilities such as footpaths and other public rights of way; open access land; designated and managed sites such as National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Country Parks; informal open spaces and other local greenspace; rivers, lakes, canals, coastal and marine waters. The term *access* also

includes information about, and promotion of, open-air recreational opportunities that people can enjoy.

Open-air recreation is a significant feature of life in England. In 2011/12 2.73 billion adults visited the natural environment, with 42% of the population visiting at least once a week. Of these visits 53% were in the countryside; 37% in urban greenspace and 11% at the coast. Two thirds of visits were within two miles of home, highlighting the importance of local access facilities. An estimated £20 billion was spent in 2011/12 in visits to the natural environment.

To support this activity there are a range of formal and informal facilities. This includes approximately 190,000 km (118,000 miles) of recorded footpaths and other public rights of way; thirteen National Trails, such as the Pennine Way, offering c.4,000 km (2,500 miles) of well managed routes through our finest countryside; approximately 865,000 hectares of Open Access Land, over 400 Country Parks and many hundreds of accessible LNRs, woodland sites and country estates.

3:0 Government policy and statutory context

The principle that people should have access to the natural environment, including to our highest quality landscapes is supported by a sizeable legacy of legislation going back over half a century, often seeking to give legal effect to long-standing freedoms of access along particular routes or over particular types of land. The key statutory provisions include:

- **The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.** Established the mechanisms for National Parks (including a recreation remit), National Trails, and the recording of the historical rights of way network.
- **Countryside Act 1968.** Established the basis for designation of Country Parks.
- **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.** Established the principles and mechanisms for recording and managing rights of access to open country and registered common land, including arrangements for dedicating additional land.
- **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.** Extended the purposes of National (and other) Nature Reserves to include a recreational purpose where this does not conflict with the core conservation purpose. The Act specifically mentions promoting and encouraging access.
- **Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.** Required Natural England and the Secretary of State to create a walking route around the whole open coast of England together with an associated margin of accessible land.

The importance of access to the natural environment is reiterated in the [Natural Environment White Paper \(2011\)](#) placing emphasis on the importance of accessible local greenspace including a proposed new Green Areas designation. Likewise [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy](#)

[for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#) recognises the significance of physical access to nature as part of the aspiration to 'reconnect people with nature'.

4:0 Natural England's role

Our approach to access is fundamental to the achievement of Natural England's overarching general purpose, as it ensures that through open-air recreation people directly experience and enjoy some of the benefits of the natural environment.

Our role requires us to maintain the unique knowledge and expertise required to work with and through others to:

- secure and improve the rights of way network (an important means by which people can gain safe, off-road access to the natural environment)
- make National Trails sustainable, high-quality routes through our finest landscapes
- implement and manage the access rights to open country and registered common land
- make NNRs more accessible and attractive to visitors
- support the creation and development of accessible local greenspace (e.g. Millennium Greens, Country Parks)
- provide access as part of delivering on wider natural environment objectives, for example through agri-environment agreements, and the development of the ecosystems approach
- deliver the England Coast Path; and
- advise Government, Defra and other government departments on matters relating to informal recreation in and enjoyment of the outdoors. And set standards and offer relevant advice to others with an interest in access.

Natural England's Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment ([MENE](#)) is a set of national statistics providing trend data on access to the natural environment, as well as data on the reasons for people accessing it.

5:0 The principles we apply to our work

AA1: Delivering our statutory responsibilities for access in an effective and collaborative way

We will deliver our statutory responsibilities, by working as effectively and collaboratively as possible, for example working with communities to find an effective way of improving off-road access opportunities for horse riders and cyclists. Our general powers and duties have implications for access, for example our advice to local authorities on planning matters, but some are more specific. The most important of these specific access responsibilities are i) powers to propose National Trails, and our partnership working with the authorities that manage them ii) a duty to prepare, issue and periodically review maps of open access land, and iii) a duty to propose a National Trail around the coast.

AA2: Providing information, advice and evidence about access

We will make available the best environmental, social and economic evidence on the benefits of access to the natural environment. We will provide advice about creating and managing accessible places and the provision of information to the public. We shall base our advice on the best available evidence and in ways that enable people to make informed choices and take positive action where they wish. We will provide evidence about the state and trends of access to the natural environment; for example the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment ([MENE](#)) survey. Based on the best available evidence and our experience and knowledge of delivery, we provide advice to Government for developing more detailed policy about access.

AA3: Integrating Access provision across our work areas

We will improve access provision by integrating access outcomes into our wider work; for example, ensuring access benefits are secured through the ecosystems approach, our management of the NNR estate, and our advice on proposals affecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

AA4: Supporting others to improve access provision

We will work to establish and maintain effective support for communities including Local Access Forums, to enable them to identify and meet their own priorities for safeguarding, improving, and promoting the access opportunities that matter to them. We will work with stakeholders to agree ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of access provision and management, including for England's National Trails.

AA5: Contributing to the evidence about access provision and its value

Working with partners and communities we will build evidence about good practice, particularly the effective integration of access with nature conservation and the environmental, social, and economic impacts of access. We also gather new evidence about access trends to the natural environment.

Related strategic standards for 'why we do what we do'

We have a set of strategic standards for 'why we do what we do' for each of the main areas of our work where we deliver environmental outcomes. These can be found in our [standards library](#):

- Access
- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Ecosystem approach
- Engagement
- Landscape
- Land management
- Land use
- Marine

Quick reference

Type of standard	Strategic standard
Purpose:	Sets out the principles that all staff are expected to apply to their work
Owner(s):	Access & Engagement Function
Sign-off:	Liz Newton, Director Access & Engagement Rob Aubrook, Director Standards
Publication:	Publication catalogue - external
Review date:	April 2014
Issue number	Final v2.0
Updated:	May 2015 – version updated to current template

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 5

Date: 26th April 2016
Title: Parishes and Planning
Author: Paul Harris, OCAF Secretariat

Introduction

At the last OCAF meeting of 19th January 2016, OCAF members discussed the planning process and considered how local councils (town councils and parish councils/meetings) could be encouraged to be aware of the opportunities that the planning process may afford to access in their local areas. Member Harry St John offered to draft a letter from OCAF that may be sent out by the county council through the regular parish mailout or the newsletter update.

OCAF Action

Members to consider the letter, discuss any amendments, and agree the next steps for its distributions

Draft letter to local councils

Dear Parish or Town Clerk

As you know every planning application in your District is referred for consultation to the relevant Town or Parish Council – for your Committee’s comments, feedback etc. This is a vital part of the planning process and your Council’s response is seen by the District Council as very much the grass roots response to all planning issues.

The Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (OCAF) is made up from volunteer members representing all interests involved in countryside access. It exists to encourage access to the countryside in Oxfordshire, to ensure the existing public rights of way system is preserved and enhanced where possible.

So can we encourage your Council that when you are consulted on any planning proposal that affects a right of way in your Parish (not that often in practice) that the response your Council makes to the District Council takes into account any impact on the public rights of way system.

The types of issues your council may wish to consider are:

- Making sure the development doesn’t alter or obstruct the legal line of the right of way (you can check the definitive map on line at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/countryside-access-maps>)
- Could the surface of the route be improved by the developer to make access easier all year round for new residents, visitors and the local community?
- Could the path ‘furniture’ like stiles, gates and bridges be improved to make them more accessible to more people?
- Are there any new links between paths needed through the site? This might include existing ‘desire’ lines where people walk a preferred route
- Do any footpaths need making available for cyclists or equestrians? The developer may be open to a request to upgrade them

These are just a few suggestions that would help meet the aims of the county Rights of way Improvement Plan 2015-2025. More information can be found here www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip If you are preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, having a section on Public Rights of Way is equally pertinent. .

Yours faithfully,

Signed OCAF Chair

OCAF contact details and website address

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 7

Date: 26th April 2016
Title: Sharing papers with Oxfordshire Rights of Way Monitoring Group and discussion about the fencing in of public rights of way
Author: Paul Harris, OCAF Secretariat

Introduction

As part of better understanding and increased efficiency the papers for Rights of Way Monitoring Group (RoWMP) have been sent to OCAF Members. Attendees of the RoWMP have also been sent the papers of the OCAF meeting. Papers for the latest RoWMP meeting will also be placed on the OCAF webpages at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf.

OCAF Members are invited to consider any item of the RoWMP and use this agenda item to discuss them.

Item on April 5th 2016 Rights of Way Monitoring Group re fencing in of public rights of way

At the last Oxfordshire Monitoring Group meeting of 5th April a paper was tabled about the fencing in of public rights of way that were previously unfenced.

A full discussion was not able to be held because there were not any land managing interests present and although the matter was aired it was agreed to defer the item to the next Monitoring Group meeting. In the meantime it was suggested that OCAF Members may wish to have the opportunity to discuss the matter.

OCAF Action

Members to consider the paper from the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (appended) and the draft note of the discussion at Monitoring Group - see text below. OCAF Members may wish to focus on the question raised - why fencing in rights of way is perceived to be necessary and what actions might need to be taken to reduce this perceived need.

Background - Draft note from Monitoring Group 5th April 2016 -Agenda item 4

Paul Harris supplied an oral update received that morning from Harry St John. HSJ wished to know if the issue was widespread and actual or just perceived to be an issue. He also referred to the one case of permanent fencing he knew about on the Cotswold Way and suggested that landowners put up temporary/permanent fencing to protect people from cattle especially people with dogs.

Nick Moon responded that across the Chilterns and south Oxfordshire/ Buckinghamshire since the 1960s many routes that were once open had been fenced and this was widespread in other areas. Although not illegal this often results in more urbanised looking routes, more nettles and vegetation on route, users can't avoid puddles and there was more erosion of the route. This meant more maintenance costs for resurfacing or drainage. Alan Futter and David Godfrey agreed that the problem was widespread. Stuart McGinness also highlighted the problem of finding routes without livestock as when taking children mountain biking the horses and cattle often bit saddles or riders.

Hugh Potter said that Field Officers will actively discourage landowners from putting up fencing that is inappropriate or that restricts the usable width of a RoW where possible and will make sure that any barbed wire does not cause a hazard to users.

Anita Coghlan said that for diversions, OCC tried to secure a wide width to allow for fencing and ongoing maintenance. Fencing in most cases was requested to prevent users and their dogs from straying onto adjacent land, livestock security (including horses) and privacy. HP added that people may break through the fencing if route has become impassable if they are at a critical point of their walk.

Jim Parke identified that fenced paths wouldn't be so much of a problem if landowners maintained the boundary hedgerow on the other side of fence. He questioned whether this type of issue featured strongly in caseload reporting.

PH responded that it doesn't feature too highly in the current caseload of the team but the team would do as much as they could -with a priority given for new fencing installations. NM said that it may be for a number of cases that the fenced routes may not be reported as an issue they may be reported as vegetation clearance issues or surface issues. HP added that the landowners should be contacting Field Officers before fencing so that they can check the alignment and width of the route and to ensure suitable fencing is used etc.

HP stated that the item would be added as a small agenda item or a matter arising at the next meeting together with any written update from HSJ. It was suggested that the issue could be raised at the next meeting of OCAF in order to get some wider debate and PH offered to gain Chair and Vice-Chair of OCAF's approval for this to be added to the agenda.

Paper presented by the Oxford Fieldpaths Society

The impact of enclosing Public Rights of Way with fencing

One of the pleasures of using rural public rights of way can be the feeling of freedom in a natural setting even if that freedom is legally constrained to a linear route, but when, as seems increasingly to be the case today, that freedom is physically constrained by an enclosing fence or fences, this visible manmade constraint inevitably detracts from the enjoyment to be derived.

Unfortunately, however, the resulting loss of amenity is not simply confined to this psychological aspect as the resultant exclusion from the path of grazing livestock allows summer growth including nettles, thistles and brambles to grow unchecked and encroaching scrub and hedge growth cannot be controlled as easily by machinery while the fence or fences prevent users from skirting round the problem. In addition, where paths become confined in this way in areas of poor drainage, another negative effect may be that they become obstructed by deep slippery mud and puddles. The end result is therefore either an increased requirement for annual mowing or other vegetation clearance or surface improvements or the right of way becoming blocked with the result that users resort to climbing over (and possibly damaging) fences etc. to bypass the problem.

Even where fenced paths are not affected by vegetation problems, it is a well-known fact that birds will use the enclosing fences as perches and in so doing drop seeds which they have gathered as food with the result that hedges develop alongside them and limit views, so that this again is an undesirable consequence of paths being fenced.

While it is accepted that landowners and tenants are legally entitled to fence public rights of way provided that minimum widths stipulated by the Definitive Map Statement, Inclosure awards etc. are observed, as fencing them has a whole series of undesirable consequences for users. It increases path maintenance requirements at a time when local authorities are looking to reduce rather than increase maintenance budgets and must cost landowners and tenants a certain amount to erect and maintain while making hedge-cutting etc. more difficult.

In consequence we wish to raise the question of why it is perceived to be necessary and what actions members of the Monitoring Group might take to reduce this perceived need.

It is hoped that with a better understanding by user groups and local authorities of the reasons why the fencing is considered to be necessary, it might be possible to make users more aware of any behaviour which is leading to the erection of the fences and thereby reduce such behaviour and the perceived need for the fences. In any event, we believe that a reduction in fenced paths might save both landowners and local authorities money and would most definitely benefit the general public.

Nick Moon
Oxford Fieldpaths Society

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 8

Date: 26th April 2016
Title: Proposed amendment to OCAF Terms of Reference re membership terminations
Author: Paul Harris, OCAF Secretariat

Introduction

At the last OCAF meeting of 19th January 2016, OCAF members discussed agenda item 6 about proposed amendments to the OCAF Terms of Reference (ToR). Suggestions made included varying the day and time of the meeting. However the two key recommendations in the paper were not decided on. This agenda item enables a decision to be taken on those two recommendations.

Background

The Appointing Authority (Oxfordshire County Council) considers that there is a need to alter the terms of reference for OCAF members as a number of members have not turned up for a number of meetings. Currently, these members cannot have their membership terminated if they have sent through apologies in advance and it needs Chair, Vice-chair and County Council to agree action. The challenges of volunteer's time allocation are well understood but non-attending members prevent new members being recruited, skew the balance of the group, and represent additional costs from postage to room hire provision.

Options

OCAF's Chair or the appointing authority (Oxfordshire County Council) could approach low or non-attending members and ask them to attend regularly or consider resigning their membership. Additionally or alternatively the Terms of Reference could be altered to enable members to have their membership terminated after a smaller number of non-attendances as per Regulations. The relevant sections are:

a) OCAF's Terms of Reference

5.14 Members may have their appointments terminated because of prolonged unauthorised absences from meetings or misconduct. Removal of members from the Forum must be agreed in writing by the Chair, Vice-chair and the County Council.

b) The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007

4.—

(1) Save as provided in this regulation, the terms of appointment of a member of a local access forum shall be determined by the appointing authority and notified to him in writing.

(4) An appointing authority -

(b) may terminate the appointment of a member of a forum if -

(i) without the consent of the appointing authority, he has been absent from all meetings of the forum during a period of one year;

Recommendations

- 1) OCAF Chair and OCC to write to all non-attending members to encourage them to attend or to resign their membership
- 2) OCAF Members to discuss and consider adopting the proposed amendment to para 5.14 of the Terms of Reference:

“5.14 Members may have their appointments terminated by the Appointing Authority if he/she has been absent from all meetings of the forum during a period of one year. The Appointing Authority will seek the views of the Chair before terminating any LAF member’s appointment”

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 9

Date: 26th April 2016
Title: Rights of Way Management Plan delivery / priority caseload approach
Author: Paul Harris, Countryside Access Strategy & Development Officer
Co-author/reviewer: James Blockley, Countryside Access Team Leader

Introduction

The County Council adopted the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 (RoWMP) on 25th November 2014. OCAF played a key role in developing the revised document. One of the most pressing actions outlined in the RoWMP is for the Countryside Access Team (CAT) to review and improve how issues are prioritised and associated caseload is managed in the light of statutory responsibilities, increasing public expectations and decreasing resources.

A number of papers and discussions have been produced since then. Support for work done to develop this approach was secured at Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum and Monitoring group meetings in September and October 2015. Development work was then put on pause to allow recruitment to the Countryside Access Team Leader position to be concluded and to enable the new team leader to guide implementation. The new team leader has been in post since March so it is now appropriate to restart this process.

Anticipated benefits from the review process

By achieving a target in the RoWMP, reviewing operations and introducing a higher degree of objectivity in how issues are prioritised and managed alongside other demands and opportunities, it is anticipated that consistency and measurable performance will be maintained and may increase. It is also anticipated that public and stakeholder expectations and the authority's ability to meet them will be better understood and more fairly managed with more of a focus on higher priority workloads across the county. By adopting this approach it should better enable the authority to still add 'value' across the county by working to secure additional resources and supporting and encouraging farmers, land managers, local communities, groups, volunteers and individuals to improve the network for all users. It is hoped that this will be able to take place in a more structured and transparent way, especially focusing on those routes that offer the greatest potential or that provide other social, health or economic benefits. There is some cross-over between this review and the current restructuring 'Lean Review' within the Commercial section of the Environment and Economy directorate at Oxfordshire County Council and it is hoped that the countryside access review will inform and add value to that wider process.

Action for OCAF

Three revised documents are attached:

- 1) Draft issue prioritisation and workload management protocol – This document takes account of comments on from the papers presented to OCAF and Monitoring Group previously and contains the draft approach to combining the majority of the team's work areas into a single issue and workload priority table. A further step is identified to enable better monitoring and reporting.

- 2) Countryside Access Team Functions summary – This is a cut down version of the information submitted to start the 'Lean Review' process and is a useful summary of the six main areas of work that the Countryside Access Team. A suggestion of relative priority for the future is added to the last column.
- 3) Valuing Volunteers – This summary note has been produced to underline the benefits from the team's commitment to community and volunteer group support.

These papers will form the basis for the finalisation of the issue prioritisation and operations review process to be combined with a form of path categorisation in due course. OCAF Members are requested to consider the papers and provide their views. Members may want to respond to the following questions:

- 1) Is the group clear about the purpose of the issue prioritisation and workload management review?
- 2) Do members understand each of the three papers and do they support/endorse each of them?
- 3) Can members identify any other information that may be useful?
- 4) How do members wish to be involved in the next steps?
- 5) Are there any other questions or comments?

Next steps in the review process

Officers will listen to the comments of OCAF and use them to help inform the ongoing process of review. It is intended that committee or cabinet member approval of a policy or protocol for issue prioritisation and/or path categorisation is obtained during 2016/17 and systems are then altered to enable this to be implemented. The Lean Review process may affect this timetable depending on how wide or deep the review process is.

DRAFT PROTOCOL FOR ISSUE PRIORITISATION AND WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT FOR PROTECTION, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS OF COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Oxfordshire County Council's statutory duty for public rights of way (PRoW) management under the Highways Act 1980 centres on ensuring that, across the network, rights are not obstructed and routes are maintained in a reasonable condition. The strategy for this is set out in the Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025. Note that management issues on asphalt PRoW are managed under a separate process by Oxfordshire Roads and Transport.

This protocol is intended to manage expectations and give guidance to officers and others involved in the fulfilment of that management responsibility in a transparent and fair way. It is intended to encompass the majority of the Oxfordshire County Council's Countryside Access Team's (OCCCAT) work through this approach, not just managing the priority of reported issues.

1. How issues are allocated a priority

The majority of public rights of way issues reported to the County Council or identified through internal inspections will be prioritised or programmed by OCCCAT after the issue has been assessed. This assessment may use supplied reports, photos, database records, and site visits to help in the determination and will normally consider one or more of the following factors where they are relevant:

- 1. Overall level of hazard or actual risk that the issue (if a safety matter) represents
- 2. The degree of obstruction
- 3. The cause and likely duration of the issue
- 4. The character of the route, its normal use and the route's normal state of repair
- 5. The impact of the issue looking at the wider network

Due to the nature of rights of way and the wide range of local circumstances it is unrealistic to set out hard and fast lists of issues or work areas and their associated priority. However using the factors above will help develop and maintain a more consistent approach across the OCCCAT.

2. How programmed maintenance and other demands form part of OCCCAT workload priorities

OCCCAT commits significant resources to public rights of way maintenance and repair work such as bridge repair and replacement, vegetation clearance, surfacing and drainage, signing, as well as responding to large and small planning applications and liaising with and supporting community and volunteer groups, All of this work is part of OCCCAT officers' potential workload but all of these involve choices being made about relative priorities

A balance has to be struck that enables the tackling of the highest priority workload issues as well as making time for lower priority work, especially that delivered by communities and volunteers where this doesn't limit highest priority action. This means that across the county a greater focus will normally be paid to the two highest priority categories 1 and 2a-c and may mean that there is less of a focus on area based management areas. Priority derived caseloads will be kept under review.

Lower Priority (3 and 4a-c) workload issues will have their own processes to maximise outputs and make the most of available finance, staff, volunteer or community resources. This may result in them being worked on with greater urgency. Examples of when this might occur include:

- When the issue is part of the same path or close by a higher priority issue receiving attention
- When the issue is part of work being funded and delivered by the landowner, volunteer group, parish council or community group
- When the issue can benefit from external funding such as TOE2 or s106/CIL
- When action is linked to seasonal or cyclical issues – e.g. installing bridges outside of flood periods and arable cultivations, or cutting vegetation outside of bird nesting period
- When a likely rapid deterioration could be prevented by swift action
- When a sudden change of circumstances makes it possible to resolve a long standing problem, e.g. minor misalignment

The two factors of issue prioritisation and other workload demands are combined in the following table. OCC CAT intends to establish a performance management framework to define operational standards, initially for highest priority issues in order to enable better monitoring and reporting.

Issue and Workload Priority Table	
Priority Category	Guideline circumstance
1	Public Safety Incident - where an accident has occurred resulting in significant injury Public Safety Issue - with high likelihood of imminent accident resulting in significant injury
2a	Lesser Safety Issue - with possibility of accident resulting in injury
2b	Priority Repeat Process - Higher priority maintenance task such as key route vegetation clearance that comes up each year or more regularly
2c	Non-hazardous but significant or time-limited issue - likely to completely obstruct access very soon or a major planning issue
3	Lesser hazard/lesser significance issue - affects a PRoW but does not completely obstruct it or may not be time-limited
4a	Area or bulk processing - lower hazard or lower priority issue such as signing or furniture that can be packaged together with others
4b	Repeat Process - Lower priority maintenance task such as less frequent vegetation clearance that comes up regularly
4c	Opportunity - standalone improvement or minor repair issue
5	No Action intended/Record update – very minor issue

Countryside Access Team Functions

Function	Why is this function important?	Who is the customer?	Is this statutory, policy, adding value or nice to do?	Relative Priority
SAFETY MANAGEMENT	<i>Ensuring public safety on the Public Rights of Way/Countryside Access network and appropriate level of response</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – all users of public rights of way including residents, land managers and visitors 	<p>Statutory or supporting-statutory under various sections of Highways Act 1980 - s41 and s130. OCC policy in adopted Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025</p> <p>LAF is statutory duty under s94 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000</p>	1
ISSUE MANAGEMENT	<i>Managing the reported issues and problems that arise on the Public Rights of Way/Countryside Access network</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – all users of public rights of way network including residents and visitors – land managers/occupiers – local councils (parish councils and meetings, town councils) – complainants – amenity and 3rd party organisations (e.g. CPRE, OFS, BHS, OSS) – district councils – statutory undertakers (e.g. utility companies) – householders – neighbouring authorities – AONB offices (Chilterns, Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs) – volunteer groups – land managers/occupiers – statutory undertakers – local councils – volunteer groups – amenity and 3rd party organisations – district councils 		2
MAINTENANCE	<i>Undertaking and commissioning the reactive, cyclical and seasonal repair and maintenance of public rights of way/Countryside Access network</i>			1/2
COMMUNITY & VOLUNTEER SUPPORT	<i>Supporting and enabling local communities, volunteer groups, and other interested organisations to manage, use and improve countryside access and public rights of way</i>			2/3
DEVELOPMENT CONTROL	<i>Responding to planning developments through Single Response, directly to district councils, & major infrastructure projects [to protect and enhance Public Rights of Way/Countryside Access- and then overseeing or commissioning delivery of mitigation measures</i>			2/3
INFORMATION & SELF-HELP	<i>Providing on-ground and web based information enabling increased self service</i>			3

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) adopted the [Oxfordshire Rights of Way Management Plan 2015-2025 \(RoWMP\)](#) on 25th November 2014. One of the most important parts of the document is the new '*Rights of Way Management Framework*' that shows how OCC Countryside Access Team (CAT) works with local communities, volunteer groups and other partner organisations work to meet the vision and aims of the RoWMP. See attached pages 41 from the plan that draws this work together.

In terms of groups undertaking survey and practical work, there are four main ones that CAT directly supports and works with – the Ramblers Parish Path Wardens, The Ramblers four practical work parties, the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers, and the Cotswolds Wardens. These four groups are self-organising, self-insuring, and self-administering which means there are no costs of direct management or recruitment etc on OCC. Other valuable work is done by the national trail volunteers, local councils, farmers and individuals.

Looking back over these four key volunteer groups' outputs over the last year and placing these against CAT staff time and cash contributions demonstrates the value of that investment and the essential role that the groups take in monitoring, maintaining and improving the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Network.

Approximate figures for Outputs/Inputs 2015/16 across all four key groups

Activity	Quantity per year (6hrs = 1 day volunteers)	Amount of OCC support time	Amount of OCC support funding	Comments/detail of OCC involvement
1. Volunteer hours surveying countryside access network (spotting and reporting issues, updating existing issues)	120 surveyors @ 24 hours p.a. = 2880 hrs/ 480 days	60 days p.a.	<£200 p.a.	5 officers @ 12 days a year to process reports and provide support/training to groups
2. Volunteer hours undertaking informal minor works (cleaning and replacing signs and waymarkers, hand trimming vegetation etc)	80 surveyors @ 10 hrs p.a. = 800 hrs/ 133 days	4 days p.a.	£200 - £300 p.a.	4 officers @ 1 day a year to process needs. Cost of waymarkers and sundries
3. Volunteer hours undertaking larger scale vegetation management	50 volunteers @ 24 hrs p.a. = 1200 hrs/ 200 days	20 days p.a.	<£1000 p.a. certification/training	4 officers @ 5 days a year to identify and arrange works
4. Volunteer hours undertaking practical access repair and improvement works (replacing stiles, and gates , surfaces etc)	50 volunteers @ 24 hrs p.a. = 1200 hrs / 200 days	50 days	£3000 p.a. direct support	5 officers @ c 10 days a year to negotiate, agree and check works
5. Volunteer hours spent preparing tools, materials etc before and after activities and associated admin	20 volunteers @ 24 hrs p.a. = 480 hrs/ 80 days	6 days p.a.	<£1000 p.a. direct support	6 officers @ c 1 day a year to train and assist. Contribution to materials, equipment and

				sundries
6. Volunteer hours negotiating access projects with landowners and occupiers and developing grant bids etc	5 volunteers @ 56 hrs p.a. = 280 hrs/ 46 days Up to £10,000 external funding for projects p.a.	50 days	c£1100 p.a. 3 rd party funding contribution to release funds	5 officers @ c 10 days a year to negotiate, agree and check works
totals	6640 hours 1100 days £10,000 external grant funding for access	190 days	c£5,500 Operations c£1100 TPF	Some cross-over of staff involvement between activity areas
Net added value ratios	Overall c900 volunteer days return on CAT's investment of staff support (5.5:1) Excellent external grant funding return for small 3 rd party funding by CAT (9:1) Task tool preparation increases outputs with excellent leverage (10:1) Survey, minor works and clearance very time effective (7.5:1) Practical and project works make good use of staff time (3:1)			

The OCC Countryside Access Team retains and delivers its statutory responsibility as highways authority for asserting, protecting and maintaining all public rights of way using professional staff in the office and in the field. Because of this responsibility there will always have to be more of a focus paid to higher priority and hazard focused work by the authority.

However, the above figures clearly demonstrate the 'added value' that the four key volunteer groups bring to the overall achievement of countryside access in Oxfordshire and the vital cash or staff time contribution that OCC makes to these groups as facilitator (see case study below) as these groups can only operate effectively on public rights of way with some level of CAT officers in support.

Together this means:

- More maintenance and repair works to more routes in people's local area
- Increased frequency of vegetation clearance on paths that are most important to local people
- Making access easier for more people and reducing landowner liabilities by replacing stiles with gates and kissing gates
- Volunteer groups generally tackling lower-priority/hazard issues on CAT officer caseload –to improve wider network and allow focus on higher priority issues using specialist staff and contractors
- Some volunteer groups share the time burden of contacting landowners and negotiating access improvements and making arrangements for materials access etc.

- Volunteer groups work with funders such as the Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment to bring in significant levels of external funding for non-statutory access work.
- Volunteer group involvement is currently able to be balanced against priority access work so long as OCC continues provision of staff time and support funding

<u>Case study – South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers – benefits to Oxfordshire Chilterns rights of way since 2008</u>	
Total number of TOE grant-funded gates installed since May 2008 (replaced poor structures identified as ‘issues’)	202
Grant funding received by TOE since 2008	£43,889
Average TOE funding per gate	£217 (materials only)
CAT cash contribution as 3 rd party funder (11%) since 2008	£4,400
CAT cash contribution as 75% of annual support for SCPMVs since 2008	£15,000
CAT staff time contribution as 75% of operation of group and supervision of work	£14,000 (200 days @£70 since 2008)
Typical contractor cost to install single gate and associated works	£250
Additional cost of 202 gates if contractor installed them	£50,500
Direct saving of being able to benefit from using volunteers and external grant funding £10,500 over 7 years	
Opportunity cost saving of avoiding contractor costs £50,500 over 7 years	

April 2016

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Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Agenda item 10

Date: 26th April 2016
Title: Countryside Access Team Update
Author: Paul Harris, Countryside Access Strategy & Development Officer

Introduction

At the last Rights of Way Monitoring Group meeting of April 5th 2016, reports updating the group on work in the last period were supplied from the Definitive Map, Countryside Access and the two National Trails Teams. All these papers were emailed to OCAF members before the meeting.

At that meeting it was suggested that OCAF members may wish to discuss the CAT update so it has been included as an agenda item

Rights of Way Monitoring Group 5th April 2016

Countryside Access Team Report

Introduction

This report summarises the activities of the Countryside Access Team in this period. Paul Harris has compiled this whilst undertaking Acting Countryside Access Team Leader role.

1. Personnel
2. Budgets
3. Operations summary
4. Caseload and priority review
5. Ramblers 'Big Pathwatch'
6. Looking back over 2015/16 ambitions

Appendix 1: Current caseload summary stats

Appendix 2: Countryside Tasks Team summary

Appendix 3: The Ramblers' Big Pathwatch - positive features in Oxfordshire reported at survey end

1. Personnel

Arthur McEwan-James was appointed as full time Field Officer for the south-west area and has been doing exceptionally well to get to grips with the largest management area in the county. Jackie Smith is also coming on strongly as the only Assistant Field Officer and is really making a difference in helping the whole team manage its caseload.

James Blockley joined the team as Countryside Access Team Leader on 14th March. James formerly worked with the Cotswolds Conservation Board for eight years as Trails and Access Officer. His role covered a wide range of duties including management and promotion of the Cotswold Way National Trail, coordination of AONB-wide access opportunities and development of the health / access integration agenda. Following a period of transition, Paul Harris is stepping back into his Access Development and Strategy role after 15 months at the helm.

Recruitment is hopefully going to be concluded for an Assistant Countryside Tasks post soon so that we can have a new starter just in time for the summer vegetation management season.

The Team is currently understaffed by a full time Assistant Field Officer and a full time Assistant Countryside Tasks Team Officer but we are unlikely to see them replaced soon. We have some part time casual cover for one AFO post. In the last report short to medium term pressures on the team caused by staffing changes and vacancies were identified. These are anticipated to continue.

2. Budgets

The operational budget for Countryside Access remains around £100k. This excludes staff costs but includes all materials, equipment, contractors to deliver works on the ground across the 2,600 miles of rights of way - including summer and winter vegetation clearance,

earmarked in capital for PRow bridge replacement works of which around £50k of this is being used for kit bridge replacements this year.

3. Operations summary

3.1 – Marcham Mill Rushey Bridge (Marcham Bridleway 17)

Since October's Monitoring Group meeting OCC has responded to externally-made points about people using the route and significantly strengthened the barriers. However these have been forcibly breached on a least two occasions and there has been some trespass across neighbouring properties. Although this is a privately owned structure it carries public rights and with our responsibilities for public user safety at the forefront of our minds we arranged for full scaffolding barriers to be installed by specialist contractors- alongside explanatory notice panels and continued regular monitoring. We expect these measures to be sufficient to completely prevent access but we will keep this carefully monitored.

In terms of repair works; although this structure is under private ownership, OCC has previously stated that it will contribute a reasonable amount for agreed works to enable it to be opened for public use again. The challenge comes when we look at the need to accommodate private vehicular use. OCC has considered the Skanska-recommended strengthening options for the structure to enable private vehicular access. Unfortunately all of these involve increasing the fill depth and surface height which would necessitate increase in effective parapet height. This then brings in the grade 2 listing as it could mean alterations to the overall proportions of the structure and will need listed building consent. The only option here seems to be applying for pre-application advice and site visits from the Vale of White Horse District Council's Conservation Team. We are currently in discussions as to whether the landowner's agent wants these held before the discussions with the district council, or if they are happy that OCC applies for pre-application advice directly with the district. This advice is considered the essential next step. A possible alternative to reduce costs and reduce further delays would be to repair the bridge suitable for all users except motor vehicles - but this would mean effectively stopping up private rights to use the bridge - and ensuring no private or public access by installing barriers or bollards (off the structure). We are awaiting response to this.

3.2 Network Management

Each of the Field Officers will have their spring forum meeting with stakeholders in the week beginning 12th April. West and Cherwell's meeting will be combined. These meetings are useful as they allow more detail about local issues to be discussed and information to be shared across all stakeholders.

See Appendix 1 for the whole Countryside Access Team caseload statistics. All of this work is linked to the cooperation of farmers and landowners, and the continued hard work by the Parish Path Wardens, the South Chilterns Path Maintenance Volunteers and the Cotswolds Wardens and other groups to monitor and improve the network alongside the work done in the background by local communities and all of the other user and amenity groups. In terms of work led through the specialist Countryside Tasks Team Appendix 2 gives a summary of the practical work completed.

3.3 Summer ('soft') vegetation clearance [SVC]

The Countryside Access team's approach to this is carefully targeted due to limited budget. Based on experience, knowledge of the team and stakeholders, and from awareness of the path type and previous reports we compile a category list of known needs. Category 1 routes most of category 2 routes will be cut first from May and Category 1 routes will have a

second cut around July. Known category 3 and 4 routes may be cut if the opportunity arises. Other paths reported as needed mowing, which are not on our existing list will be assessed as there is a limit to how much extra the team or contractors can do so we will have to say no in some cases. Last season's figures show that around 290km of PRoWs were cleared. 94% of Cat 1 routes were cut, 88% of Cat 2, 10% of Cat 3 and 10% of Cat 4.

3.4 Bridges inspections

From October 2015 through to March 2016, officers have tried to schedule photo-recording assessments of the larger bridge structures on the network (around 290). This is to enable the recording of measurements and reference photos that will then enable the OCC Bridges Team to triage general and principal inspections according to the revised OCC structures policy. Officers will be prioritising inspections of smaller bridges in spring 2016 to build on the survey started at the same time in 2015. This will add to the list of works being put forward for completion.

No major structures were able to be worked on during 2015. However there are design and build orders in for bridges/structures at Compton Beauchamp Byway 12, Aston, Cote and Chimney Fp 1, North Leigh Fp13 (this currently has the temporary bridge installed to get route open), North Aston Fp2, and Langford Fp11. We are also assessing potential options at Somerton Br 5 causeway. The first major structure scheduled for replacement should be East Hendred Fp 15.

4. Caseload and Priority review

Support for work done to develop this approach and meet the action in the Rights of Way Management Plan was secured at Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum and Monitoring group meetings in September and October 2015. Work to develop this approach further was then put on pause to allow the recruitment process for the Countryside Access Team Leader position to be concluded and to enable the new team leader to take this forward. It is intended that a paper will be prepared for the April 26th meeting of the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum but there may be some cross-over between this and the restructuring 'Lean Review' process started across the Commercial section of the Environment and Economy directorate at Oxfordshire County Council.

5. Ramblers 'Big Pathwatch'

The Ramblers launched the Big Pathwatch back in July 2015. It was their most ambitious campaign ever, and they set out to walk and survey every footpath in England and Wales. By gathering a complete picture of the state of our paths, they stated that they would be able to make sure they're kept clear for the people who use them every day. - See more at: <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/the-big-pathwatch.aspx>. Key highlights are:

- Over 14,000 people registered to take part, adopting nearly 58% of all available squares (over 91,000 in total) and completing surveys of over 48%.
- People reported over 128,000 features on their travels, sending photos of nearly 47,000.
- Users' main concern was the absence of signs on routes or where people have to cross roads (over 21,000 combined reports).
- Users were impressed with how welcoming signs can be on the path network (nearly 15,000 reports). [See **Appendix 3** for the map and key for 'nice issues' found across Oxfordshire.

- Overall, over 67,000 of those features caused people concern, including nearly 15,000 that have stopped people in your tracks. The Ramblers says that knowing about all these problems brings us one step closer to finding a solution.
- Surveyors also reported over 58,000 positives.

At project end, the Ramblers sent us their end of project complete data including all the positive responses. Adam McQueen has analysed these data and found:

- Total Length of Oxfordshire's PROW surveyed : **1,779.6km** (42.09% of total at 4227.5km)
- Length of PROW in Oxfordshire surveyed (with bad and good issue) : **1,279km** (30% of total at 4227km)
- Length of PROW surveyed (with only good issues) : **500km** (11.8% of total at 4227km)

As reported previously, the team assessed all the reports coming through as impassable and those that were filtered out went on to be included on the access management database. Summary figures are:

- priority 1 issues -1
 - priority 2 issues – 19
 - priority 3 issues – 77
 - priority 4 issues – 19
 - priority 5 issues – 6
- There were also 27 issues reported but were resolved.

In terms of next steps, the Ramblers states "*Now the survey period is over, we are analysing the data. We will not be focussing on individual authorities but instead seeking to produce an overview of the rights of way network on a national scale.*"

6. Looking back on progress in achieving 2015/16 ambitions

The team has managed some key development areas of work on top of the 'day to day' management of the rights of way network.

- a) Significant progress was made to develop a revised approach to issue prioritisation and a caseload management approach. This is still on track to be further developed and implemented by end 2016/17 as set out in the Rights of Way Management Plan. We are also joining up with Hampshire County Council to look at the best approach to securing investment for key strategic existing and potential access routes.
- b) The CAMSWeb online reporting facility is fully up and running has been adopted by most reportees. I am very grateful to the work of the team to get this working and keep this working, especially Adam McQueen who is our tireless technical expert in this area. The team is also very grateful to all of our reportees who have taken up the new system and who have attended familiarisation training. We hope to have an improved process up and running without too much delay and a major benefit of this will be the ability to upload images alongside the report.
- c) The team has not yet been able to proceed with the CAMSMOBILE system (a means for officers to access information and update our system live and in the field), but all officers have been equipped with smartphones to improve efficiency and more are using other agile working tools to make the most of their time in the field. We hope that the improved CAMSWeb version will allow updating of issues in the field by the team in due course.

- d) We have improved the feedback report we use for people to update existing caseload issues as we are very keen to make sure that the active caseload only contains correct and current issues. This is mostly for use by the Parish Path Wardens and we are very grateful to those wardens for their time in monitoring routes. Thanks as always to Jim Parke who coordinates the group, plus the local coordinators who help steer and focus the work of the wardens.
- e) The team has continued its development of a bridge inspection and replacement programme and are working hard with colleagues in OCC bridges and Skanska contractors to improve communications, monitoring and identification of priorities and effective budget spend.
- f) Programmes for Hard Vegetation [winter] and Soft Vegetation Clearance [summer] known as HVC/SVC have been refined and improved over the last year. By ring fencing funds before the start of the financial year we are working towards securing contractor commitment very early on so we know what we are able to do - and then we have been better at scheduling works around these two key commitment areas.

The team appreciate the help and support that members of groups and individuals have given them over the years and who continue to give their time, energy and commitment to countryside access and public rights of way. See agenda item 6a about valuing volunteers.

On a personal note I am very grateful to all the Countryside Access Team officers who I have managed for the last 15 months. We have all significantly improved our ways of working in a period of challenging budget and public expectations and we've all coped extremely well with so many changes to key personnel and the uncertainties over budget and other pressures.

Paul Harris
Countryside Access Strategy & Development Officer

April 2016



Caseload at start of reporting period (1st September 2015) :

By Type (top 10) :	Total : 3,559
Stile/Repair or Replace	507
Definitive Map/Line of Path	192
Vegetation/Undergrowth Removal Required	183
Crossing/Bridge or Culvert Repair	181
Surface Improvement Request	181
Waymark/Waymarking Required	165
Vegetation/Overgrowth Removal Required	164
Fence/Fences	153
Ploughing Cropping/Cropping Cross Field Path	135
Gate/Repair or Replace	128
Others	1,570

By Priority :	
Priority : 1	8
Priority : 2	1046
Priority : 3	1597
Priority : 4	738
Priority : 5	162

Issue added during reporting period (1st September 2015 - 29th February 2016) :

In this season the total number of reports including duplicates was : 1,184

By Type (top 10) :	Total : 860
Stile/Repair or Replace	87
Tree/Fallen Tree(s)	71
Vegetation/Undergrowth Removal Required	69
Crossing/Bridge or Culvert Repair	66
Finger Post/Repair or Replace	56
Ploughing Cropping/Cropping Cross Field Path	42
Waymark/Waymarking Required	42
Waymark/Post Repair or Replace	35
Finger Post/Request	30
Ploughing Cropping/Cropping Field Edge Path	27
Others	335

Issues reported by: (Top 10)	
Public	222
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England	106
Big Path Watch	39
Ramblers' Association	6
Ramblers Parish Paths Wardens	5
The Chilterns Society	3
Landowner	2
Amenity Group	1
Countryside Service	1

By Priority :	
Priority : 1	18
Priority : 2	155
Priority : 3	476
Priority : 4	174
Priority : 5	33

Issue resolved during reporting period (1st September 2015 - 29th February 2016) :

By Type (top 10) :	Total : 774
Stile/Repair or Replace	90
Crossing/Bridge or Culvert Repair	83
Finger Post/Repair or Replace	57
Tree/Fallen Tree(s)	54
Vegetation/Undergrowth Removal Required	38
Gate/Repair or Replace	30
Waymark/Post Required	26
Vegetation/Overgrowth Removal Required	24
Definitive Map/Line of Path	23
Waymark/Post Repair or Replace	22
Others	327

By Priority :	
Priority : 1	16
Priority : 2	223
Priority : 3	369
Priority : 4	143
Priority : 5	23

Current caseload at end of reporting period (29th February 2016) :

By Type (top 10) :	Total : 3,643
Stile/Repair or Replace	503
Vegetation/Undergrowth Removal Required	214
Waymark/Waymarking Required	189
Definitive Map/Line of Path	186
Surface Improvement Request	183
Crossing/Bridge or Culvert Repair	167
Ploughing Cropping/Cropping Cross Field Path	160
Vegetation/Overgrowth Removal Required	158
Fence/Fences	153
Gate/Repair or Replace	123
Others	1,607

By Priority :	
Priority : 1	10
Priority : 2	978
Priority : 3	1,701
Priority : 4	769
Priority : 5	173



Current Caseload by Type and Priority (top 10 Issues) :

Stile/Repair or Replace : 503

Priority 1 : 1
Priority 2 : 187
Priority 3 : 276
Priority 4 : 36
Priority 5 : 3

Vegetation/Undergrowth Removal Required : 214

Priority 2 : 66
Priority 3 : 106
Priority 4 : 33
Priority 5 : 9

Waymark/Waymarking Required : 189

Priority 2 : 3
Priority 3 : 69
Priority 4 : 107
Priority 5 : 10

Definitive Map/Line of Path : 186

Priority 2 : 20
Priority 3 : 64
Priority 4 : 85
Priority 5 : 17

Surface Improvement Request : 183

Priority 1 : 1
Priority 2 : 44
Priority 3 : 103
Priority 4 : 30
Priority 5 : 5

Crossing/Bridge or Culvert Repair : 167

Priority : 0
Priority 1 : 3
Priority 2 : 72
Priority 3 : 65
Priority 4 : 15
Priority 5 : 1
Priority 9 : 10

Ploughing Cropping/Cropping Cross Field Path : 160

Priority 2 : 43
Priority 3 : 100
Priority 4 : 12
Priority 5 : 5

Vegetation/Overgrowth Removal Required : 158

Priority 2 : 43
Priority 3 : 88
Priority 4 : 23
Priority 5 : 4

Fence/Fences : 153

Priority 2 : 43
Priority 3 : 62
Priority 4 : 39
Priority 5 : 9

Gate/Repair or Replace : 123

Priority 2 : 31
Priority 3 : 76
Priority 4 : 16

Others : 1,607

Priority 1 : 5
Priority 2 : 426
Priority 3 : 692
Priority 4 : 373
Priority 5 : 110
Priority 9 : 1

Task Team Statistics : 1 September 2015 - 29 February 2016

Appendix 2

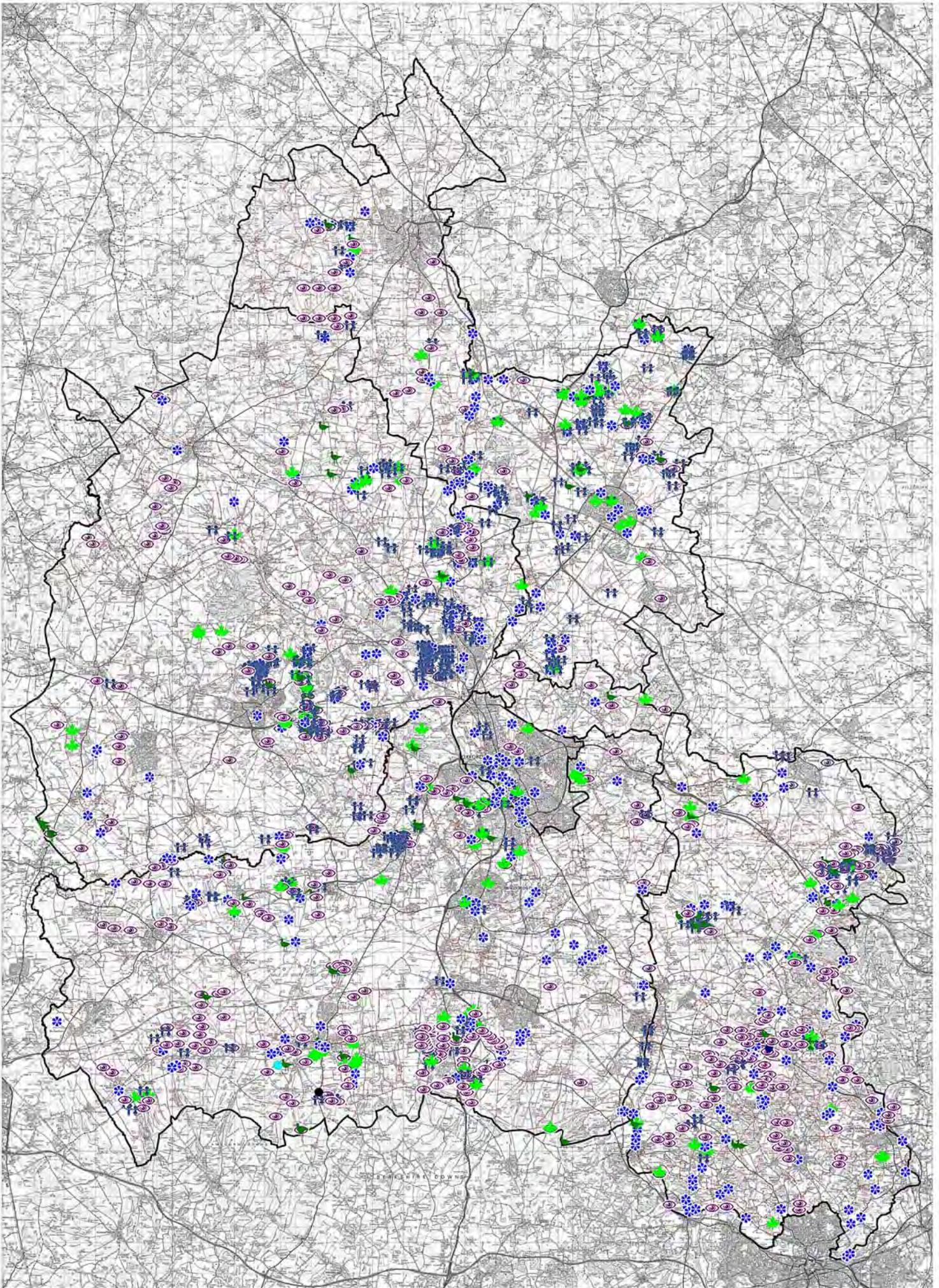
Worksheets created this season:	232
Worksheets completed this season:	241
Worksheets completed on/by due date this season:	165 68.46%
Worksheets completed after due date this season:	76 31.54%

Worksheets completed by team this season:	Total
TaskTeam	215
Contractor	11
Bridge Team	9
Volunteers	6

Worksheets completed by type this season:	Total
Fingerpost(s)	46
Repeat Works	39
Bridges and Infrastructure Work(s)	35
Repeat Site Inspection	35
Infrastructure Work(s)	22
Vegetation Clearance	19
Urgent Work(s)	15
Infrastructure Plus Work(s)	9
Bridges External	6
Emergency Work(s)	6
Inspection(s)	5
Drainage/Surfacing	2
Vegetation Plus Clearance	2

Individual Jobs completed this season: **354**

Jobs completed by type this season:	Total
RepeatInspection	55
InstallCrossing/Bridge/General	35
RepeatWorks/Repeat Works	27
InstallWaymark/Post	21
RepairFingerPost	20
Install/Gate/Kissing	18
RemoveVegetation/Furniture	17
RepeatVegetation/Furniture	16
RepairCrossing/Bridge	16
RemoveVegetation/Fallen Tree(s)	12
InstallFingerPost/General	12
RepairFingerPost/Plate	11
RepairSurface/General	10
RemoveVegetation/Hard Vegetation Clearance	10
InstallGate/Pedestrian	10
RemoveVegetation/SoftVegetationClearance	6
RemoveVegetation/Side	6
RepeatDrainage/RepeatDrainage	5
RepeatVegetation/SoftVegetationClearance	4
RepeatVegetation/HardVegetationClearance	4
Others	39



Positive_Issues by BPW_FeatureCategorisation+"/"+BPW_FeatureDesc

 Attractive views/Mountains and hills	(37)
 Attractive views/Open country	(367)
 Attractive views/Other	(65)
 Attractive views/Town /City	(10)
 Attractive views/Woodland	(77)
 Bridges, gates & stiles/Open country	(1)
 Fauna/Birds	(33)
 Fauna/Butterfly	(12)
 Fauna/Larger mammals	(31)
 Fauna/Other	(8)
 Fauna/Small mammal	(14)
 Finding your way/Broken sign on route	(1)
 Flora/Flowers	(40)
 Flora/Fungi	(5)
 Flora/Other	(16)
 Flora/Trees	(85)
 Interesting/Bench	(52)
 Interesting/Buildings	(128)
 Interesting/Lake or body of water	(55)
 Interesting/Natural features	(14)
 Interesting/Other	(79)
 Interesting/Pub or tea shop	(54)
 Interesting/Toilets	(7)
 Road crossing/No safe way to cross	(1)
 Welcoming/Other	(111)
 Welcoming/Person	(19)
 Welcoming/Signs	(397)