

Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2023

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Present

Keith Bacon – in the Chair, Richard Atkins, Christine Cane, Geoff Doggett, Tony Gibbons, Tim Harris, David Lilley, Kate Leonard, Steve Read.

In attendance

Andrew Farrell- Programme Manager Water, Mills and Marshes, Anna Gregory- Environment Agency (observing), Ken Hawkin- Norfolk Local Access Forum, Andrew Hollis- Norfolk County Council, Dan Hoare -Head of Construction, Maintenance and Ecology, Kylie Moos - Administrative Officer, Jo Thompson-Waterways and Recreation Officer.

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies received from Peter Dixon, Duncan Holmes, Peter Mason, Joe Mitchell, Alison Holden-Standley, Deborah Wicks, Christopher Yardley.

The Chair welcomed Jo Thompson, the newly appointed Waterways and Recreation Officer and new member Geoff Doggett to the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

Members indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered and set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

3. Minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 30 August 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2023 were approved as a correct record.

4. Summary of actions and outstanding issues following decisions at previous meetings

Lost paths in the Broads

The Chair has previously raised the issue of lost paths in the Broads to the river at Norfolk Local Access Forum Rights of Way subgroup meetings and it has been escalated to the Norfolk Local Access Forum (Norfolk LAF). Ken Hawkins added, the NLAF supports the request however there is only so much that Forum members can do. The focus needs to be on contacting officers at Norfolk County Council (NCC).

Water quality monitoring

The action from the last meeting is carried forward. The Chair will be sending the letter sharing the views of the Forum to the Director of Strategic Services after the meeting.

Staithe report

The action from the last meeting is carried forward. Jo Thompson will focus on staithe in the Broads which are on owned land by the EA and other public bodies, as one of the objectives in the new Integrated Access Strategy plan.

5. Project update from Norfolk County Council

Andrew Hollis, Project Officer for the Active Travel Team at Norfolk County Council (NCC) presented an update on current projects.

Update to Norfolk Access Improvement Plan

The Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP) Monitoring Report has been completed for September 2022- August 2023 and has been through the Norfolk LAF and NCC Infrastructure and Development Committee. The report provides an update on progress against the NAIP targets and provides information on projects delivered in the last year which directly contribute to the delivery of the NAIP. A copy of the report will be shared with the Forum.

Access Audit Review

Following the publication of the Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, NCC is reviewing this document and how best practises can be incorporate into ways of working. A priority area is updating accessibility audits to reflect the guidance and incorporate elements from the access chain. The access chain is a tool that has been developed by the Sensory Trust and is a way of consistently reviewing and auditing journeys and access. A copy of the guidance can be found at the following website: <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/resources/resource/outdoor-accessibility-guidance-download>

Travel Norfolk

Travel Norfolk is a journey planner bringing together sustainable travel modes in Norfolk based on the users' motivation: www.travelnorfolk.co.uk. The website allows users to compare their journey options based on CO2 produced, duration, steps taken and cost.

Experience Project Resource Hub

The Interreg funded Experience Project has finished delivery and a resource hub has been created to collate the best practice from the project. This includes a library of presentations and manuals, case studies and video resources. This can be found online on at: www.tourismexperience.org/resources-hub

Norfolk Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy

The strategy has been updated to align with latest government guidance and linking into the Norfolk Local Cycling and Walking Plan (LCWIP). The draft new strategy was out for Consultation over October and November. Feedback is being reviewed to be incorporated into a revised document and this will be going through the formal committee and cabinet process for adoption in the new year.

Norfolk Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

A countywide LCWIP covering 20 markets towns in Norfolk and strategic links to connect communities. Following a consultation this summer the plan has been updated to take in feedback on the routes proposed and identify priority schemes for delivery. The updated plan will be taken through the formal sign off process alongside the Norfolk Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy in the new year. Market towns in the Broads such as Wroxham and Hoveton are included in the active travel networks. Further information can be found at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and->

[partnerships/policies-and-strategies/roads-and-travel-policies/local-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-plans](#)

A Forum member asked if anyone checks the pathways and conditions of the roads for the new routes to make sure that they are safe for use. Andrew Hollis responded, one of the key purposes of the LCWIP is to enable NCC to open opportunities for funding to develop the routes which are in the plan. The opportunities are predominantly feasibility studies to understand where there may be issues with a stretch of connectivity, for example surface conditions, path widths, lack of crossings.

Andrew Middleton will continue to lead on the project plan for the Wherryman's Way.

6. Water Mills and Marshes access and accessibility

Andrew Farrell, Programme Manager for Water, Mills and Marshes provided an overview of the access projects over the last six years. One of the integrated themes of the programme was to encourage people out into the landscape and improve physical access to and within the scheme area, this was broken down into six individual project threads.

2A: Gateways to the Broads

In Partnership with the Broads Trust, three new "Discovery Hubs" have now been installed in the Broads at Beccles Quay, Great Yarmouth seafront, and Salhouse Broad. New hubs are already planned for delivery in 2024 and 2025 to expand the network into the Northern Broads.

A series of mini gateways are being delivered in partnership with the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership to place access and interpretation into most of the stations along the Wherry Lines. These are digital products which have been handed over to the Community Rail Partnership for installation.

2B: Going the Extra Mile

Originally an added value project for project 2A with no budget assigned. This has now become a catch all holder for additional partnership projects.

Working with the RNIB to increase the amount of tactile mapping in the area. The first installation has been installed at Whitlingham Country Park, the second map will be installed in Beccles Quay in the next two weeks.

The scheme has also supported other organisations like Pathmakers CIC from this project thread and participated in both of the Walk-Norfolk festivals in 2022 and 2023.

2C1: Waveney Marsh Observations

Working with Stakeholders along the River Waveney to improve access. Key outputs have been with Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT) at Carlton Marshes to install a new accessible bird hide near to the Broads Authority pontoon 24 hour public mooring, new riverside interpretation and two new power chairs.

This has been delivered with additional support from the Green Recovery Fund and one of the SWT's volunteers who recently completed a fundraiser for the trust. A further tactile map is due to be delivered at the site.

Carlton Marshes also interfaces with the Wherry Lines station project to connect people with Oulton Broad.

2C2: Angles Way Feeder Paths

Working with local landowners and NCC and Suffolk County Council (SCC) to improve the connections to the Angles Way in the Areas around Beccles. The scheme has also worked with the Beccles Townlands Charity in the development of their new property on the North Bank of the river to create a new permissive path along the old railway embankment, enabling shorter walks near to Beccles and Gillingham, while taking in excellent views of the marshes and town. This has led into new partnership legacy projects with Beccles Town Council, Beccles Fenland Trust, SWT and the Beccles Townlands Trust.

2C3: Broads Mill Trails

One of the key milestones has been the redevelopment of the circular walk across Halvergate. New digital signage is being produced and tested for the system. This project has also seen the physical improvements to a portion of the bridleway between Manor Farm and the path to Muttons Mill with the path repaved.

Working with Norwich University of the Arts, new signage has been created and the final interpretation outputs are due in the spring.

Online resources have been developed to help people to get out into Halvergate. The analytics show that this is one of the more popular trails in the area.

There is ongoing legal work with NCC around the Weavers Way which extends beyond the life of the project.

Other Project Interfaces

A Changing Places Toilet has now been installed at Whitlingham Country Park. This has been supported by the Trust and South Norfolk District Council and the Dept. for Levelling up and Communities. New funding is lined up to continue delivery of the next two at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft station. The scheme has also supported path improvements around the Great Broad. This complements the tactile mapping and was additionally supported by the Landfill Community Fund and Norfolk Social Infrastructure Fund.

The WWII Acle project has also created a new Pillbox Trail, and the final interpretation is now in place in the town.

Project Legacy and Future

An Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project with Norwich University of the Arts, Anglia Ruskin and UEA is recreating the Broads Digitally. The facility will be in the city centre, and it will digitally recreate the Broads to give up to 30 people their first taste of being out in the landscape.

Comments and answers to questions

BLAF members welcomed the presentation, and thanked Andrew Farrell for the update.

A Forum member asked how the success of the scheme has been monitored and if there were any lessons learnt. Andrew Farrell responded, a requirement of the grant was the use of external evaluators. The evaluators have been independently contacting stakeholders for feedback and running their own monitoring programme. Physical interventions such as people counters, map button presses and engagement out and around the marshes has also been collected over the duration of the scheme. The report is due to be publicly published by the end of the year.

A Forum member commented that the Broads Authority pontoon at Carlton Marshes often has two cruisers moored and asked if the pontoon is access for Carlton Marshes, or for general mooring. Andrew Farrell confirmed that it is used for general mooring and was installed as part of the redevelopment of Peto's Marsh which the Broads Authority carried out three years ago. [other relevant comment which was made after the meeting: A Forum member asked if the Authority is planning to restrict mooring at any time in the future. Dan Hoare responded, the only restriction on this mooring is 24 hours stay, the same as the byelaws that apply to other full Broads Authority 24 hour moorings. The initial business case for locating this mooring here was to facilitate access to the SWT site, but no time restrictions shorter than the standard 24 hours apply. SWT have expressed interest in a rails, sails and trail tour including Carlton Marshes, but this would depend on using the pontoon to embark people].

SWT are planning to improve the surface of the circular walk which reaches the River Waveney at Carlton Marshes so that it is accessible for all. The work is dependent on drier period of weather and volunteer labour.

A Forum member asked if there are any permissive paths on the Halvergate circular trail. Andrew Farrell confirmed that the circular walk is already a footpath and most of the trail has a bridleway status.

7. Norfolk Local Access Forum

Ken Hawkins, Vice Chair of Norfolk LAF provided an update to the Forum and thanked the Chair for continuing to attend Norfolk LAF meetings and representing the Broads LAF.

ELMS

The Norfolk LAF continues to be concerned about the lack of clear inclusion of access in Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) despite various promises since the start of ELMS. The Suffolk LAF are trying to invite a Defra representative to the next regional LAF meeting in January 2024 to share their concerns.

Registering historic rights of way

The cut off date for registering historic rights of way in England has moved from 1 January 2026 to 1 January 2031. Currently there are over 200 definitive map modification orders to be processed at NCC and the standard rate of processing is approximately 12 per year.

Norfolk PRow network

The Norfolk LAF receives a quarterly report from the Highways department which looks after the Public Rights of Way network. There is a concern over the number of outstanding issues, and the timescale which they are being reviewed. The Norfolk LAF would have liked to have seen a reduction in the number of issues now that two years has passed since Covid-19, when reporting was at its peak.

Norfolk Access Improvement Plan

Norfolk LAF welcomes the increase of recommendations going through NCC committees such as the Norfolk Access Improvement Plan (NAIP). Embedding LAF issues in the NCC processes has been a positive outcome this year. Officers are now reporting on which of the NAIP objectives are being delivered.

A Forum members asked if any of the financial cuts at NCC are likely to affect the footpaths and trails departments. Ken Hawkins responded, there has not been any formal announcements, but the budgets are already very limited and unlikely to make a significance difference if they had to be cut.

8. Any other business

Forum member Joe Mitchell sent their apologies and the following update to the Forum:

“With regards to water quality testing, I spoke to the lead official from the Swim England East Region Open Water Championships that get held Whitlingham Broad each summer about the topic of water quality issues and testing.

The Council employs a company called Swim Safety to collect, test in a laboratory and report back in the weeks and days before the OW event. Water quality is tested for all competitions around the UK.

Whitlingham had some very good (excellent) results. They test for the presence of algae, and faecal bacteria (E. coli, Enterococci & Steptococci).

Standards are based on the EU Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC).

Guidance on the results can be found here: <https://swim-safety.co.uk/results-guidance/>”

Dan Hoare added that, as Whitlingham Country Park is a privately owned site, and the organisers are attracting people from all over for a specific event, their duty of care extends to testing the water quality. The information is helpful, but the same model cannot be adopted in the Broads.

The second stage of the 2023 review of the Integrated Access Strategy (IAS) closes on the 14 December 2023. Further information can be found on the website: <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-work/transparency/consultations>

A Forum member asked if the recent flooding has had a negative effect on riverbank paths in the Broads. Dan Hoare advised that NCC are responsible for the path surface and conditions. [Andrew Hollis provided the following response after the meeting:

“Feedback from the Trails Team is that current capability within the team means that they are unable to check all low-lying riverside paths after storms. Also due to health and safety policy we are not permitted to enter deep flood water to inspect paths. It is usual to wait for flooding to recede before any inspection for damage caused by river scour. We do try to inspect the NCC owned trails i.e., Marriotts Way, Paston Way, Pingo Trail and Weavers Way after extreme storms for fallen trees but also due to current capacity we mostly inspect after a third party report.”]

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum would be held on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

The meeting ended at 11.15am

Signed by

Chair

Appendix 1 – Declaration of interests Broads Local Access Forum, 29 November 2023

Member	Agenda/minute	Nature of interest