



## **Leighton-Linslade Ouzel Valley Park Steering Group**

25 May 2022 at 10:30 am

### **Present (in person or remotely):**

Cllr Tony Morris (LLTC), Cllr Victoria Harvey (LLTC/CBC), Cllr Clive Palmer (LLTC), Pauline Hey (Local Access Forum), Jon Balaam (Greensand Trust), Howard Hughes (CBC), Jon Creasey (CBC), Ian Haynes (LLTC), Sarah Sandiford (LLTC), Ruth Mundy (South Beds Friends of the Earth), Spencer Green (Canal & River Trust), Cllr Mark Versallion (CBC), Gill King (South Beds Friends of the Earth), Steve Halton (CBC), Susannah Miller (Canal & River Trust), Adele Duperouzel (South Beds Friends of the Earth).

### **1. Introduction and Apologies**

Apologies were received from Peter Bate, Cllr S Owen, Clive Beckett, Rosalind Bacon and Steve Lakin.

### **2. Approval of Minutes of 2 March 2022**

The notes of the previous meetings were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising**

It was noted there was some graffiti near the canal bridge on Leighton Road (land in Connells ownership near the disused public toilets), this was currently disguised by long wildflowers but the Canal & River Trust was planning to remove the graffiti with their volunteer team.

JB advised he would re-circulate the initial proposal on biodiversity reporting as no feedback had been received as yet.

The proposal/aspiration to widen the footpath near St Leonard's Church on the approach into Heath and Reach was discussed. Cllr Versallion advised that traffic calming measures were supported by village residents and it was hoped that some other traffic calming measures might be implemented. There was discussion about a section of land by the church which was within the Green Belt; Cllr Versallion advised planning applications had been repeatedly refused by CBC and potential options were under discussion with the landowner, church and parish council.

### **4. Review of action list**

TM/JB had reviewed the action list as discussed at the previous meeting and a revised, shortened version would be circulated.

## **5. Information updates**

### **CBC**

- HH advised that there was concern about the rise in costs since the 2020 proposal work on development of a visitor centre at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park to be funded by S106 monies. The quantity surveyor had indicated costs were typically up by 15% but detailed work was being done on this. The cost increase might necessitate some changes in the plan. CBC Assets were looking at modular type buildings and costs. It was hoped that there would be more information by the summer and the project timetable could then be revisited.

A query was raised about when S106 developer monies had to be used (2024/25).

A query was raised about potential for grant/match funding but there appeared to be little opportunity for CBC to apply for this.

- At Tiddenfoot Waterside Park there would be new benches and updates to the natural play facilities
- At Clipstone Brook, RoSPA was doing a water safety assessment, looking at changing flow conditions
- At Riverside Walk there had been delays in tree works due to the bird nesting season
- Southern meadows proposed car park: rising costs meant this might not be financially viable and Highways were also reviewing potential for road changes.
- Cllr Harvey advised there had been a noticeable drop in the numbers of waterfowl and insects along the riverside and it was felt that biodiversity could be further improved.

### **LLTC**

- New Government regulations were coming into effect on 22 June regarding the registration and storage of plant protection products
- The iTree ECO survey results would be presented to committee on 6 June.

### **GST**

- Signage and interpretation was going into the new eastern development for the Ouzel Valley Meander walking route.
- Interpretation was being installed in June for the Greensand Country heritage tree trail.

- A recent steering group meeting had approved the design of the Greensand Ridgeway gateway feature at the bottom of the High Street in Leighton Buzzard – a planning application was now in train. The design incorporated a water bottle filling station so liaison with Anglian Water was taking place. It was hoped that the feature would be installed before the September Bedfordshire Walking Festival.
- Green Flag judging would take place at Rushmere Country Park this week
- The new High Sheriff was doing a 5-day walking/networking event (for invitees only) which would include Rushmere Country Park

### **Catchment Partnership**

- There was a focus on volunteer training with a new qualification for surveying rivers, which included remote learning over four weeks and practical field work. Four people including Cllr Morris had recently completed the training and some survey work would now be done. The next course would run in the autumn.
- The top 9 sites for survey work had been identified and included Clipstone Brook/Eaton Bray brook.
- Cllr Harvey raised again the concern over water quality and microplastics pollution; JB advised that there was concern near the bridge by Leighton Middle School and that an “outfall safari” would seek to map water quality at outfalls to build up a picture and help identify trends. However, as most water pollution happened over a matter of a few hours any real-time investigation was challenging.

### **Canal & River Trust**

- The drop-in information event in April regarding the towpath upgrade had been well attended
- CRT was collecting data on towpath usage (cycling, walking, dogs, canoeing)
- The towpath improvement works were scheduled for 6 June – end August, but CRT would allow access for the Linslade Canal Festival on 30 July
- CRT was looking at options for the northern section of the towpath but due the Operations Manager had just left and a replacement would need to be recruited, which would have an operational impact
- Access project: outline designs were being worked on with CBC
- Canal interpretation: there had been no time to progress this as yet but all ideas were welcomed. JB advised there might be potential to use some leftover S106 funding for interpretation on the riverside walk to be located on the towpath, subject to CRT agreeing a suitable location – this would need liaison with Siobhan Vincent at CBC

## **6. Greensand Country presentation**

As requested previously, JB gave a presentation in respect of the Greensand Country landscape area. Initially the Greensand Country project had been set up with National Lottery Heritage funding and 80+ projects with 7 themes had taken place, including a number in Leighton-Linslade. Now that the initial funding had expired, a new phase was being led by the Greensand Trust.

Greensand Country comprised a narrow ridge which included half of Bedfordshire woodland, all of Bedfordshire's heathland and a significant proportion of estate parkland such as the Shuttleworth estate.

A forward plan had been developed for the next 3 years to keep momentum going. This included establishing a new Board, securing funding for a Partnership Co-ordinator and recruiting new partners and supporters. Aims included restoring the landscape, improving habitats and encouraging wider awareness of the landscape.

Themes going forward were:

- Caring for the landscape e.g. restoring and creating habitats
- Recreation & wellbeing e.g. green social prescribing
- Local action on climate change e.g. carbon offsetting, reducing waste
- Rural economy & sustainable tourism e.g. electric vehicle charging points across Greensand Country for visitors

Cllr Harvey spoke in support of green social prescribing and the potential for linking up networks. It was suggested that the CRT community engagement team was also keen on exploring social prescribing and suggested they be put in touch with BRCC who were leading on this in the area).

## **7. Leighton Buzzcycles Cycling Strategy**

It was understood that Buzzcycles had done a permeability survey in respect of the eastern development which indicated that it was currently quite inaccessible. It was requested that the Buzzcycles report be circulated. This was fundamental to the Green Wheel and permeability had been emphasised throughout the planning application process so this was disappointing and concerning.

It was suggested that a representative of CBC Planning be invited to attend the next meeting to explain this in more detail.

## **8. River Ouzel**

### **a) sewerage and over extraction**

Cllr Harvey advised his was a national issue and a report had been provided to the MP who would take this up. Issues included agricultural run-off,

microplastics, pharmaceuticals and other pollution. There was a concern that this had led to a reduction in waterfowl numbers.

**b) Internal Drainage Board dredging**

Cllr Morris reported that a half mile stretch of the river Ouzel had recently been dredged by the IDB resulting in scraping of the river banks, loss of vegetation and concern about the impact. An environmental impact team from the Environment Agency had attended and given formal advice to the IDB about their “overzealous” work and it was hoped that restoration measures would take place. Cllr Morris had made a formal complaint to the IDB which JB would monitor through the Catchment Partnership. JB added that the IDB had not followed its biodiversity strategy and had used external contractors. It was understood that the fossilised jawbone of a beaver had been found and since these had been extinct since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this showed the depths of the dredging work.

**9. Grovebury Quarry update**

A meeting was due to be held in July to address resident concerns about extensions to works and this would also be discussed at the next meeting of the Sandpit Strategy group.

**10. AOB**

Steve Halton advised he had sent out a draft walking map and invited comments as soon as possible. A designer was now working on the map. An up to date cycle ways map was also needed. Cllr Palmer suggested whether the map could include a note about where inclines were.

**11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would take place on Monday, 5 September at 10:30am.

The meeting ended 12.35pm.