

# Ashford Rural South Forum

## Notes from meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015

Venue: Hamstreet Pavilion

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**Present:** Mike Angell (KCC Member for Ashford Rural South); George Sparks (Orlestone & Hamstreet); Stephen Denis (Ruckinge); Hilary Moorby (Kingsnorth); Bill Hollands (Shadoxhurst); Maggie Keenan (Warehorne); Peter Davison (ABC); Aline Hicks (ABC). Two members of the public were also present.

Notes: Annette Haigh

**Apologies:** Alison Breese (Kingsnorth); Julian West (Woodchurch); Stephne Mytton (Billsington); Jane Martin (ABC); William Howard (ABC)

### **Notes:**

MA welcomed everyone and asked for all present to introduce themselves. He explained that as the KCC Member for the area, he should hold at least one meeting a year enabling Parish Council Chairs/representatives to come together in order to share any issues and/or ideas.

MA introduced the key speaker, **Graham Rusling, Public Rights of Way and Access Manager (KCC)**.

GR gave a short PP presentation which included useful information and data:

- The types of Public Rights of Way (PROW) and the use that may be made of them, including Byways Open to All Traffic.
- There is a definitive map identifying these – this is a legal document.
- There are 6,900kms of byways in Kent of which 99%+ are publically maintainable.
- KCC have published a document about strategy and policy. See 'Making the most of Kent's Countryside & Coast'.  
[www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/countryside-policies-and-reports/countryside-and-coastal-access-improvement-plan](http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/countryside-policies-and-reports/countryside-and-coastal-access-improvement-plan)
- Over 8,000 unique issues are reported every year. Reports include issues around flooding, vegetation (a never ending battle), damaged stiles/gates and bridges. Demand is higher than the ability to deal with – therefore there is a statement of priorities which is followed.

- In addition to KCC employed staff, around 100 volunteer wardens go out to tackle issues. However, there is only a certain amount that they can do.
- Using the improvement plan as evidence of need, it is hoped that external funding can be unlocked, resulting in extra improvements being made.
- Working with Network Rail to improve bridges. (Bridges are a particular problem at present).
- In Kent there are 14,000 signposts and 9,000 stiles (over 2,000 of which are located in the Ashford District) 300 bridges, hundreds of km of metalled and surfaced paths. The value of the network (infrastructure) is calculated at around £86million.
- KCC have a code of conduct relating to the use of byways. The issue is with irresponsible users causing damage to areas adjacent to the byways, vehicle trespass and nuisance and the ability of the routes to sustain modern vehicle traffic. KCC look to maintain the rights of all users even where traffic regulation orders have been introduced. Enforcement and policing are key to successful implementation of any control measures.

Following the presentation, a question and answer session was opened to the floor:

A member of the public put forward his view on motor cyclists using byways – Trail riding on two wheels is not competitive, it's for people like him who simply like riding in the countryside. There are maps to show where you can legally ride but unfortunately, some people who purchase bikes are unaware of this resulting in them riding wherever they like. The police have off-road bikes which would enable them to deal with this but they do not have the man-power to use them.

A second member of the public who lives close to a byway which is frequently used by bikers commented on the amount of noise they make, especially at weekends. If she confronts them, she is told that it is a byway and that they can do whatever they like. She reported that they are abusive, rude and intimidating.

GR response – Always report to the police – otherwise this will never become a priority.

**Q** – An excellent job of hard-coring was carried out 5-6 years ago. BOAT go into fields and deep-rut. Is there any chance of fencing area?

**A** – The emphasis on fencing and boundaries has always been with the land owner. KCC would only do this for safety purposes. Drop barriers have proved effective where traffic regulation orders are in place.

**Q** – CCTV cameras?

**A** – Can have these for overt surveillance purposes. Use of covert surveillance is heavily regulated..

MA, Q – Would there be any mileage in Parish Councils identifying areas where ‘things’ can be done – then looking at viability?

GR, A – It is intended to “re-energise” the byways working group to look at the issues reported over the last couple of years .

**Action for all** – Inform GR of which routes are affected.

Suggestion from floor – Could audits be carried out? Could Parish Councils write to GR to explain an issue which could then be forwarded to the ‘byways working group’?

Comment from floor – Both local and Kent government talk about *process* but it is difficult to get *outcomes*.

Q – What can be done regarding a land owner who is allowing over-growth on a footpath, resulting in it being unusable? He won’t do anything about it and says that it will be closed.

A – Contact GR directly about this.

[Graham.rusling@kent.co.uk](mailto:Graham.rusling@kent.co.uk)

Q – Are land owners responsible for overgrowth through stiles?

A – General rule is that anything growing up in the highway is the highway authority’s responsibility, overhanging is the landowners responsibility.

Q – Right of way by the Royal Military Cannel – for motor cyclists/other motorised vehicles?

A – Consultations for the Countryside and Coast Improvement Plan identified a need for greater equestrian and cycle access. The Royal Military Canal was identified as a potential route for such access. Landowners would be involved and consulted at an early stage. Rights may be created by agreement or by order. In the case of an order creating higher rights compensation would be payable to those landowners impacted.

View from the floor – If a road is not metalled, it should not have motorised vehicles of any kind on it.

It was felt that the main issues were with weekenders from overseas, such as Belgium.

The meeting finished with some networking.