Dorset Local Access Forum Meeting

Date: Tuesday 21 July 2026, 10:00-13:00
Format: Hybrid meeting, County Hall Meeting Room 1 / Teams
Notes prepared from: meeting transcripts provided

You Tube link for meeting

https://youtu.be/aJXO5hZfk6U

1. Welcome, introductions and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting of the Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Joint Local Access Forum. Members were reminded to declare any interests against agenda items as they arose. No public questions were received.

2. Minutes, actions and matters arising

- **A35 / A31 bridleway severance**
  The Forum noted that severance issues are now reflected within the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, so this item can be removed as a standing repeat action unless a specific update arises.

- **Quarry / common land issue**
  There has been no substantive progress on the common land element. Neil Dackham now has the relevant maps and is continuing to look at the issue. The Forum noted that Open Access map updates may help clarify historic common land exchanges. The dedication of a bridleway route through the quarry is moving closer and is awaiting signature from the quarry owners. Further issues remain around the car park, barbed wire fencing, the agreed zig-zag access path and public awareness that the land is common.

- **Loders to Bridport / Bradpole route**
  A meeting took place on 3 July involving Loders Parish Council, Dorset Council officers and others to discuss concerns about the feasibility report relating to the old railway line across the Mappercombe Estate. It was clarified that the ROWIP is a high-level strategic document and does not commit the Council to a specific route or delivery decision. A further meeting is expected in the autumn with the Parish Council, with potential for wider public engagement once specific route options are clearer.

  Concerns were raised that Loders Transport Group had not been able to attend the previous meeting and that attention may be focusing too heavily on FP37, rather

than a safer and more direct route. It was agreed that officers would discuss whether a wider meeting with interested parties could be arranged.

- **Wessex Ridgeway**
  A meeting has taken place and a note was circulated with the agenda. The Great Chalk Way material was shared with Ramblers and LAF members, but no volunteers have come forward to join a Wessex Ridgeway support group.

- **Dorset Explorer colour accessibility**
  The GIS team has added options allowing users to select their own colours to improve accessibility. Thanks were noted to Sue Phillips for her work with the GIS team.

- **Natural England / Coast Path**
  Natural England provided an update on the King Charles III England Coast Path. There were no objections to the Lulworth to Kimmeridge proposals and Natural England hopes approval will be forthcoming. Dorset Council has been offered an establishment grant for the Lyme Regis to Rufus Castle stretch, including the section that will roll back at West Bay. The Secretary of State has approved the Christchurch Harbour section from Southbourne to Mudeford Quay, but that approval has been legally challenged.

- **Hodmoor Common Land**
  Further information is still awaited about Dorset Council's responsibilities in relation to common land, particularly where issues relate to farming practice rather than direct access. The County Farms Manager and Legal Team are being consulted.

- **Open Access Mapping Review**
  A response is still awaited from Rafe Barnett, and a further approach may be made if no reply is received.

- **Chapel Lane gates**
  The issue was deferred to the BCP Council update.

- **Chideock / Shute route**
  The route has reached the top of the hill, but a landowner block remains in relation to making the final connection down to Bridport.

3. Dorset Council Green Space Management and Maintenance update

Dorset Council reported 1,160 jobs received through the system since the previous meeting on 21 April, of which 836 had been completed. Most reports related to vegetation clearance and cropping issues, alongside other rights of way matters.

Work reported included bridge installation in Purbeck and North Dorset, highway verge cutting, Green Flag Awards for several council-managed sites, recruitment of two assistant rangers, replacement of eight stiles with gates, resurfacing and handrail works on the North Dorset Trailway in Blandford, and access improvements to the trailway at Charlton Marshall.

Western and coastal works included drainage improvements on the new Chideock bridleway, Moonfleet Bridge and boardwalk completion, Portland surfacing and signage improvements, new bridges at Powerstock and Beaminster, coast path fencing rollback near Kimmeridge, steps at Shipton Gorge and drainage works at Spearhay Lane.

The Forum discussed crop obstructions. Dorset Council confirmed landowners are contacted promptly when reports are received, with a 14-day period to reinstate routes, and most cases are resolved within or shortly after that period. The Forum suggested that education and seasonal messaging for landowners could help prevent recurring crop obstruction problems.

4. Definitive Map Modification Orders and Public Path Orders

The Definitive Map team reported 259 DMMO cases not started, of which approximately 230 are British Horse Society 2026 project applications. There are 44 DMMO cases in progress, 33 awaiting submission to the Planning Inspectorate, and two currently with the Planning Inspectorate: Western Portland and Mill Lane, Chideock.

The team is close to confirming the Longham Lakes application at Ferndown, which will create another link from the main road into Longham Lakes, although a locked gate will need attention before access can be fully available.

Public Path Orders are currently more manageable, with five not started, 40 in progress, five confirmed since the last meeting and five new orders made. Around half of current Public Path Order cases relate to Town and Country Planning Act applications.

The backlog was discussed in detail. It was explained that one fully trained full-time DMMO officer can usually process around six to ten DMMO applications per year, depending on complexity, and Dorset currently has around “one and a bit” fully trained DMMO staff capacity.

The Forum discussed British Horse Society applications involving UCRs / UUCRs and potential recording as byways open to all traffic or restricted byways. Officers explained that the applications seek to clarify legal status and secure definitive map protection, but that each case would depend on the evidence.

An action was noted to investigate making definitive map statements available online, potentially through Dorset Explorer, with appropriate disclaimers.

5. BCP Council Green Space Management and Maintenance update

BCP Council introduced Hellie Gray, who has joined as Rights of Way Officer.

BCP provided an update on the proposed camera / "Street View" survey of rights of way. A data protection assessment has taken much of the year but has progressed to legal review, and officers hope to begin recording paths once approval is received.

An update was given on the Stour Valley Way. A solar panel development at Parley has a planning condition to create a new publicly accessible path along the river, with a four-metre clear width sought and bridleway specification intended. Works are likely to include access-compliant gates, vegetation clearance and replacement of narrow bridges.

A major planning application at Canford, involving around 1,000 new properties, includes the Stour Valley Way through the site as a proposed linear park. BCP will seek a high-quality route, appropriate crossings, further connections and contributions to Stour Valley upgrades.

BCP also described work to protect the Upton Trailway, Roman Road and Stour Valley Way through the Local Plan, including protecting land either side of access routes so that openness, character and directness are not lost through development.

On Chapel Lane, BCP confirmed that a new off-road bridleway is open and available for use. The intention is to formalise this route through the planning process and close off the problematic on-road right of way.

6. Draft Dorset Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan

The Forum discussed the draft ROWIP and the consultation process. The consultation was expected to run from 21 July to 21 October 2026, with comments to be submitted via the ROWIP consultation route.

A significant discussion took place around proposed wording referring to path creation orders and compulsory purchase powers. Some members felt that explicit wording around compulsory purchase would be inflammatory and counterproductive when trying to work constructively with landowners. Others felt there may be a place for carefully worded reference to legal powers as a last resort where significant public benefit is at stake.

A possible compromise was discussed, using less confrontational wording and focusing on Dorset Council considering legal mechanisms, including Section 26 Highways Act 1980 path

creation orders, only where required and as a last resort. No final wording was agreed at the meeting.

The Forum agreed that it would not be possible to produce a formal response during the meeting and that a working group should be convened. Members were asked to send comments to Janet by Friday 21 August, using page numbers and referring to the version of the ROWIP published online.

The Forum agreed that its formal response should be submitted as a letter rather than by completing a tick-box style online consultation form, given the Forum's statutory consultee role and the need for a detailed line-by-line response.

The working group meeting should be held in person, avoiding Wednesdays, and dates should be circulated for the end of August / first 10 or 11 days of September.

7. Feedback from associated groups

- **Dorset National Landscape**
  A site visit took place in Purbeck, including heathland and access land, with contributions from RSPB and the National Trust. The visit focused mainly on heathland management and drainage works near Poole Harbour, rather than public rights of way.

  The Forum noted that Dorset National Landscape is aware of the LAF and has indicated that the Forum may be asked to comment on Farming in Protected Landscapes applications involving public access, although no such requests have yet been received.

- **Cranborne Chase National Landscape**
  No access-related meetings had been attended since the last Forum meeting, though the Forum noted that Cranborne Chase is regarded as strong on access information and trail maps, including routes supported by Farming in Protected Landscapes and Heritage Lottery funding.

8. Consultation responses since the last meeting

The Forestry Commission continues to consult the Forum on felling licence applications. A standard response has been developed, checking Dorset Explorer and reminding applicants to consider public rights of way, access land, temporary closures and Natural England permissions where relevant.

The Hamworthy Ferry Depot regulated letter / access restriction decision was noted as complete, with no further action required.

9. BCP Council Local Plan scope and consultation

The Forum discussed whether to respond to the BCP Local Plan scoping consultation. Relevant themes included sustainable and convenient transport, infrastructure, natural environment, climate and ecological emergency, and health and wellbeing.

It was suggested that any response should pick up issues raised by BCP officers, particularly the need to protect not only public paths but also the land either side of important access routes.

The consultation deadline was confirmed as Monday 27 July 2026. Janet indicated she would try to prepare something quickly with Nikki's help if possible.

10. DLAF work plan

Members had submitted a large number of comments and ideas for the Forum's future work plan. The strongest theme was improving, extending and linking the network of shared-use paths and trailways in Dorset. A suggested practical step was to make trailways a regular agenda item, with named trailways and regular progress updates.

The second major theme was improving inclusivity across the public rights of way network, including replacing stiles with gates and addressing surfacing issues. It was noted that Dorset Council already has a strong policy of replacing stiles with gates wherever possible.

Other suggested work plan themes included the CROW access land review, access to access land, greater engagement with the planning system, signage, agricultural subsidy opportunities, public transport links to countryside access, rights of way severance, integration of UCRs, and wider countryside access for motor vehicle users.

The Forum agreed that finalising the ROWIP response should be the immediate priority, with the work plan to be revisited afterwards. Janet and Graham will work on structuring the work plan in mid to late September, using the previous spreadsheet format as a basis.

11. Any other business

- **DLAF social media**
  Jackie proposed that DLAF establish a social media presence, initially through a Facebook page, to share updates, promote access improvements, publicise events and engage a wider audience. The idea was broadly supported, subject to checking relevant social

media policies, terms of reference and any guidance for Local Access Forums before anything goes live.

It was suggested that councillors, parish councils, community pages and existing access-related groups could help share the page once established. Jackie offered to set up a draft page and circulate the link, but officers asked that relevant guidance be checked first and that content be reviewed before publication.

- **Cattle safety on rights of way**
  Jackie raised concerns about public safety where rights of way pass through fields with cattle, citing personal experiences at Kingston Lacey and Corfe Castle. The Forum discussed the balance between legitimate grazing and public safety, noting that cattle are often curious rather than aggressive, but that risks can arise with dogs, young stock or cows with calves.

  Officers confirmed that where incidents are reported, Dorset Council contacts the landowner, reminds them of the relevant legal requirements and logs incidents to provide evidence if recurring issues arise.

  The Forum suggested that social media could be used to signpost official advice and explain where to report incidents. Janet offered to send Jackie links to relevant cattle safety information, including Ramblers advice and a specialist organisation focused on cattle-related public safety incidents.

- **DLAF membership webpage**
  It was requested that the DLAF membership page on the Dorset Council website be updated to include new members and the organisations they represent, so that people engaging via social media or other routes can identify relevant contacts.

- **Parish rights of way liaison**
  The Forum discussed the importance of local and parish input in delivering many ROWIP-related aims. It was noted that parish rights of way networks are less formal than in the past, although senior rangers know the active parish contacts in their areas. The ROWIP is expected to address reinvigorating this network.

- **Dorset COP**
  Members were informed that Dorset COP will take place on 14 November at Kingston Maurward, with the theme “how to make an impact for climate and nature”. Greenways are expected to run a workshop on rural trailways and active travel networks. Details are to be circulated.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting was agreed for **Tuesday 1 December 2026 at 10.00am**, at the Dorset History Centre. The meeting will need to finish by 12.30pm, so the agenda should be kept focused.

Action Log

No.	Action	Owner	Deadline / timing
1	Remove A35 / A31 bridleway severance as a standing repeat action, as it is now covered within the ROWIP.	Graham / Chair	Next action list
2	Continue work with Neil Dackham on quarry / common land issues, including mapping, car park, fencing and access arrangements.	Dorset Council officers	Ongoing
3	Progress bridleway dedication through the quarry once signatures are secured.	Dorset Council / quarry owners	Ongoing
4	Discuss whether a wider meeting can be arranged on the Loders to Bridport / Bradpole route, including interested parties beyond the Parish Council.	Dorset Council officers	Before autumn route meeting
5	Pass thanks to Sue Phillips for work on Dorset Explorer colour accessibility.	Graham / officers	As soon as practical
6	Circulate Natural England coast path update received from Tim Hall.	Janet	After meeting
7	Follow up Open Access Mapping Review if no response is received from Rafe Barnett.	Janet	Ongoing

8	Ask Sophie / relevant officers to check whether common land fencing permissions in east Dorset remain valid.	Dorset Council officers	Ongoing
9	Investigate options for publishing definitive map statements online, potentially via Dorset Explorer, with suitable disclaimers.	Vanessa / Definitive Map team	Report back to Forum
10	Consider seasonal / educational messaging for landowners about crop obstruction and reinstatement of public rights of way.	Dorset Council / DLAF social media if established	Relevant cropping season
11	Progress BCP data protection assessment so rights of way camera survey can begin if approved.	BCP Council	Ongoing
12	Continue work with developers on the Parley / Stour Valley Way route, including bridleway specification, access-compliant gates and bridge improvements.	BCP Council	Ongoing
13	Seek Local Plan policy protection for key routes including Upton Trailway, Roman Road and Stour Valley Way, including land either side of paths.	BCP Council	Through Local Plan process
14	Formalise the Chapel Lane off-road bridleway and resolve the existing on-road right of way issue through the planning process.	BCP Council	Ongoing
15	Members to submit comments on the ROWIP, using page numbers and the current online version.	All DLAF members	Friday 21 August 2026
16	Collate member comments on ROWIP.	Janet	After 21 August 2026
17	Circulate possible dates for an in-person ROWIP working group, avoiding Wednesdays.	Claire / Graham / officers	End Aug / early Sept
18	Arrange room and printed ROWIP copies for the working group.	Claire / Graham / officers	Before working group
19	Confirm with Giles whether DLAF can submit its ROWIP consultation response as a formal letter rather than completing the online questionnaire.	Janet / Graham	Before final submission
20	Prepare DLAF formal ROWIP response following working group discussion.	ROWIP working group / Janet	Before 21 October 2026

21	Prepare a response to the BCP Local Plan scoping consultation if possible.	Janet with Nikki	By 27 July 2026
22	Revisit and structure the DLAF work plan after the ROWIP response work, using the previous spreadsheet format.	Janet and Graham	Mid to late September
23	Check relevant social media policy, terms of reference and Local Access Forum guidance before DLAF social media page goes live.	Graham / officers	Before launch
24	Draft / set up proposed DLAF Facebook page, subject to policy checks and review.	Jackie	After policy clearance
25	Send Jackie links to cattle safety information, including Ramblers advice and specialist cattle safety resource.	Janet	After meeting
26	Use future DLAF social media, if approved, to signpost cattle safety advice and incident reporting routes.	Jackie / DLAF	Once social media agreed
27	Update DLAF membership page on Dorset Council website with current members and representative organisations.	Graham / officers	As soon as practical
28	Circulate details of Dorset COP on 14 November at Kingston Maurward.	Relevant member / officers	When available
29	Keep 1 December agenda focused to allow meeting to finish by 12.30pm.	Chair / Graham / Claire	Before next meeting