Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2026

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Present

Keith Bacon (Chair), Chris Balls, Harry Blathwayt, Christine Cane, Geoff Doggett, Edward Gilder, Tim Harris, Pat Holtom, David Lilley, Darren Reeve, Jane Wallis, Christopher Yardley.

In attendance

Caroline Bidwell (Placemaking Team Leader (Norfolk County Council)), Rebecca Clark (Administrative Officer), Emily Leonard (Waterways Projects Officer), Tobi Radcliffe (Waterways and Recreation Officer), Lorraine Taylor (Monitoring Officer).

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

Apologies received from Richard Atkins, Mark Collins Darren Wynne and Tony Gibbons.

2. Declarations of interest

Members indicated they had no further declarations of interest other than those already registered.

3. Minutes of the Broads Local Access Forum meeting held on 19 November 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2025 were approved as a correct record and agreed by the Chair.

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

Members noted that updates on outstanding actions would be covered under relevant agenda

5. Halvergate Marshes Bridleway Loop

Christine Cane presented concerns raised by members of the equestrian community regarding the Halvergate Marshes bridleway loop, which forms part of the Weavers' Way.

It was reported that a section of the route is currently not usable for horse riders due to the condition and design of gates. Approximately 17 gates were identified along part of the route, many of which are difficult or impossible to open from horseback. Issues included poorly hung gates, chained closures, and gates tied shut.

Caroline Bidewell confirmed that Norfolk County Council had carried out a site audit and acknowledged that several gates constitute obstructions and do not meet required accessibility standards. Landowners have been contacted and advised that improvements are required, with the potential for enforcement action where necessary. The County Council is also offering funding support to assist with gate improvements as a goodwill measure.

The Forum welcomed the update and agreed that a letter should be sent to Norfolk County Council to support the work being undertaken.

6. Norfolk County Council Trails Network update

Caroline Bidewell presented an overview of the Norfolk Trails Network and recent progress. The network consists of long distance routes and circular trails across the county, including several routes within the Broads. Improvements have focused on accessibility, infrastructure upgrades and reducing maintenance backlogs. Significant progress has been made in reducing reported defects and improving route quality.

Examples of improvement works included boardwalk upgrades, installation of new signage and enhancements to access infrastructure. New design approaches aim to improve accessibility for all users, including those with mobility needs. Discussion also took place regarding the materials used in boardwalk construction, with members noting that both timber and recycled plastic present environmental challenges. Concerns were raised around microplastics from synthetic materials and treatment chemicals associated with timber, and it was acknowledged that neither option is entirely free from pollution issues. Caroline Bidewell agreed to investigate further and provide information on any available research comparing the environmental impacts of wood and plastic materials.

Caroline Bidewell explained that projects such as the Bramerton footpath are currently delayed due to issues relating to Biodiversity Net Gain requirements. An update is expected once further guidance is received later in the year.

Discussion took place regarding erosion impacts on routes at Hardley Flood and Surlingham. It was noted that sections of the Wherryman's Way have been lost to the river and that a permissive path previously installed by the landowner has also subsequently been lost. Caroline Bidewell confirmed that discussions are ongoing with the landowner to identify a potential alternative route. It was noted that if the route were to be moved further inland, improvements to the surface would be required to make it suitable for use.

It was further explained that, unlike coastal routes where 'rollback' allows paths to be moved inland as erosion occurs, this provision does not currently apply to riverbank paths. This presents a challenge in identifying suitable long-term solutions that are not prohibitively costly. Norfolk County Council confirmed that they are continuing to explore options with landowners and partners, with the aim of avoiding the permanent loss of key routes, particularly along the Wherryman's Way.

Members also raised concerns regarding the loss of access to the bird hide at Hardley Flood and the wider economic and recreational impact. This will be investigated further.

The Chair welcomed closer collaboration between the Norfolk Local Access Forum and the Broads Local Access Forum, and an invitation was extended for the Norfolk Local Access Forum Chair to attend a future meeting.

7. Active Travel England update

Tobi Radcliffe provided an update on Phase Two of the Active Travel England National Parks Capability Fund.

Funding has been secured to progress route feasibility studies, with the aim of bringing at least one route to a delivery-ready stage. A project officer will be recruited to support this work.

Discussion took place regarding connectivity between routes and the importance of integrating walking, cycling and public transport.

Members raised concerns regarding recent reductions in bus services across the Broads area. It was agreed that this is a significant issue impacting access and should be considered separately from Active Travel work.

8. Integrated Access Strategy annual report

Tobi Radcliffe presented an update on progress under the Integrated Access Strategy.

Work has continued across land and water access projects, despite a period of vacancy in the lead role.

Members discussed access at Pyes Mill in Loddon, where fencing has restricted use of moorings and angling access. It was noted that improvement works are planned and that access considerations will be included in future developments.

Ongoing work is also taking place with the Environment Agency to improve information on angling access points and infrastructure across the Broads.

Members considered the report relating to access restrictions on Ludham and Potter Heigham Marshes. It was noted that the proposal relates to the continuation of restrictions on dogs within the CROW access area to protect sensitive habitats and wildlife.

The Forum agreed that there was no objection to the continuation of the restriction and supported the approach set out in the report. This response will be provided as part of the statutory consultation process.

9. Broads Local Access Forum annual report

The annual report was presented and noted.

It was agreed that the report provides an accurate summary of the Forum's work and would be submitted to the Broads Authority.

10. Access for All update

Improvements have been completed at several sites including refurbishment of toilet facilities and upgrades to angling platforms. Work has also been undertaken to improve accessibility at key locations.

A new paddle craft access pontoon has been installed at Hoveton, which has received positive feedback from users. Further opportunities to expand similar facilities across the Broads will be explored.

Members highlighted the importance of working with local councils and user groups to support future projects.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Broads Local Access Forum will be held on Wednesday 11 November 2026 at 10.00am

The meeting ended at 12.28

Signed by

Chair

Action	Owner	Status/Notes
Send a letter from the Broads Local Access Forum to Norfolk County Council supporting the work being undertaken to improve accessibility and remove gate obstructions on the Halvergate Marshes Bridleway Loop.	BLAF / Broads Authority officers	Agreed under Item 5
Investigate and provide information on any available research comparing the environmental impacts of timber and recycled plastic materials used in boardwalk construction.	Caroline Bidwell (Norfolk County Council)	Action arising from Item 6
Investigate concerns regarding the loss of access to the bird hide at Hardley Flood and the wider economic and recreational impacts.	Norfolk County Council	Follow-up from Item 6
Invite the Chair of the Norfolk Local Access Forum to attend a future Broads Local Access Forum meeting.	BLAF / Broads Authority officers	Agreed under Item 6
Recruit a Project Officer to support Active Travel England National Parks Capability Fund work and route feasibility studies.	Broads Authority	Project action noted under Item 7
Submit the Forum's response supporting the continuation of restrictions on dogs within the Ludham and Potter Heigham Marshes CROW access area as part of the statutory consultation process.	Broads Authority officers	Agreed under Item 8
Submit the Broads Local Access Forum Annual Report to the Broads Authority.	BLAF Chair/Officers	Agreed under Item 9
Explore opportunities to expand paddle craft access pontoons and similar accessible facilities at other locations across the Broads.	Broads Authority	Future work identified under Item 10