

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
20 SEPTEMBER 2011
7.00 - 9.10 PM**



Present:

Members:

Mr Michael Abbott (Chairman)
Councillor Michael Brossard
John Deakin
Sharon Holt
Mr Richard Mosses
Councillor John Porter

In attendance:

Graham Pockett, Parks & Countryside Development Officer
Amanda Roden, Democratic Services Officer
Richard Walton, Head of Parks & Countryside
Rose Wicks, Parks & Countryside Projects Officer

Guest:

Martin Gilchrist, Natural England

Observers:

Mrs D M Smith, Mid & West Berkshire LAF

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr David Bertie
Mr Joe Dodson
Mr Mike Gates
Hugh Fitzwilliams, Rights of Way Ranger, BFC

1. **Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed all members to the Forum and Martin Gilchrist from Natural England.

2. **Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2011 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute 20, Thames Basin Heath and SANGs

In the third paragraph, it should read dropped kerbs at Harvest Ride, rather than dropped curbs at Harvest Ride.

Arising on the minutes, Rose Wicks thanked Sharon Holt for contributing an equestrian photo for use by the Parks and Countryside team. The aim was to continue to build on this portfolio of pictures to include action shots of horseriders in

high-visibility gear in preparation for the redesign of the Parks and Countryside, Horseriding in Bracknell Forest leaflet.

(Action: Rose Wicks/Sharon Holt)

3. **Membership and Recruitment**

Winkfield Parish Council had approached Bracknell Forest Council regarding the nomination of a Parish Council representative to the Local Countryside Access Forum. A response had been given suggesting that a Parish Councillor could apply to join the Forum as an individual member if they wished. Forum members were representatives of user groups and interest groups.

David Putt was no longer working at Be Heard and was now working on the Jealotts Hill Community Landshare Project. Simon Pettigrew, David's replacement at Be Heard, had been contacted regarding whether he would like to attend LCAF meetings to represent the interests of improving access to areas for learning disabled adults. It was suggested that David Putt could be contacted to see whether he could still attend LCAF meetings in his new role.

(Action: Graham Pockett)

4. **National and Regional LCAF Work**

Martin Gilchrist, Natural England, advised Forum Members of changes in the organisation in April 2011 in relation to budget, structure and staffing. Regions no longer existed, there were new national teams with access and engagement functions. Martin worked in a new team called 'People and Partnerships' which worked on issues in relation to access such as volunteering, diversity, and health.

Martin covered the areas of Berkshire, Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight, and was the first point of contact for LAFs in these areas. There were nine LAF groups, and soon to be ten. Martin could offer support, for example, in relation to LAF guidance. The South East Regional Co-ordinator undertook some work in this area but this role may not continue beyond April 2012.

Martin was in the process of introducing himself to LAFs but emphasised that LAFs could continue using existing contacts in Natural England (NE). Regional LAF meetings used to be held before the restructure of NE but LAFs would now be encouraged to use a new online forum which would provide some functions of NE's role and would be a place where Fora could communicate with each other. This would be rolled out over the next few months with the aim for one member from each LAF to have access.

In late January or early February the Southern Conference was due to take place as an information gathering exercise.

Forum Members discussed equestrian access and vulnerabilities when horse riding. Horses were not allowed on certain types of rights of way (i.e. footpaths). However opportunities to open up the PRoW network for horse riders to give them access to certain paths, for example, on vulnerable corners needed to be explored. It was recognised in the ROWIP that more needed to be done in this area. This would be fed into the mid term review of the ROWIP and future actions.

Hugh Fitzwilliams and his team were complimented for keeping the vegetation cut back. It was an aim to open up sites and put in bridleways in Bracknell Forest. The section of the Hawthorne Lane bridleway in the Royal Borough of Windsor and

Maidenhead had been re-surfaced with treated shredded wood and this had made an improvement to the route.

Martin Gilchrist attended neighbouring LAF meetings and offered to provide summaries of the meetings for the Bracknell Forest LCAF. Forum Members were reminded that the next Mid and West Berkshire LAF meetings were due to be held on 18 January 2012 and 17 May 2012.

The Natural Environment White Paper had identified setting up new partnerships to support biodiversity improvements. Defra and Natural England had identified that LAFs could have a role in Local Nature Partnerships. The Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum had applied for funding from Defra to develop their existing partnership into one of a Local Nature Partnership. There was no formal approach yet from BNCF to LAFs in Berkshire to be consulted. However, there were strong existing links, for example, via Bracknell Biodiversity Forum. Bracknell Forest LAF would find the best way to strengthen existing mechanisms such as site visits, joint working, and having a monitoring role on some work.

5. **Mid-Term Review of ROWIP**

The Bracknell Forest ROWIP, first produced in 2006, was being reviewed midway through its term. A draft of the Mid-Term Review, 2011, including network improvements and an action plan, would soon be published online. Forum Members were thanked for their comments on the review.

Two further actions had been included since circulation with the agenda:

- Continue to liaise with the rights of way users, particularly horse riders through LCAF to explore options to improve the safety of road crossings for PRow.
- Consider better utilising waymarkers to identify which local authority is responsible for rights of way that cross over authority boundaries.

Forum Members would be sent a link to the review once it was published online.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

Developer guidance would contain more detail in relation to rights of way and possibly, for example, information regarding upgrading a footpath to a bridleway.

6. **Definitive Map and Statement Review**

A comprehensive review of the Definitive Map and Statement was currently being undertaken. There had been several changes to the map and statement since the year 2000. These included 17 reclassifications, 12 diversions, 2 closures and 7 creations.

A creation order had been discovered for a footpath across Lily Hill Park, which was not shown on the map or statement, and so a legal event modification order would be required in order to amend the map and statement. Footpaths converted into cycle tracks were being investigated in conjunction with the Highway Authority. It appeared that part of Gypsy Lane in Bracknell was subject to a Cycletrack Order, and this section should therefore be removed from the definitive map, since there was no PRow classification for cycle tracks.

There were a number of other footpaths that had been physically converted into cycle tracks in terms of width, tarmac and kerbs and signage, but there were no legal orders for these. This meant that they were maintained as highways, signed and lit as

cycle paths, but technically remain footpaths. This review was hoping to resolve these cases, but there was a short timescale available in which to achieve this.

The aim was to resolve these issues in the current review and publish by 2012. There would be publication of Legal Event Modification Orders in the local newspaper regarding creations, diversions and extinctions. Some anomalies would not be completely resolved but the text could explain what had happened ready for the next update.

The first Definitive Map and Statement of Bracknell Forest was created in 1952. Some Highway Authorities had been running pilot schemes in relation to finding "hidden" footpaths and bridleways before 2026 or they could be lost forever. It was suggested that different maps of Bracknell Forest could be compared for discrepancies but it was unclear whether the material and resources would be available to achieve this.

There were three modification order applications pending. One modification order application was regarding Sandhurst Footpath 15 where an application had been received to remove the PRow from the map and statement. The Parks and Countryside Team had been in consultation with Sandhurst Town Council and carried out research at Berkshire Records Office and RMA Sandhurst regarding maps of the area. The Team had also thoroughly researched the London Gazette archives for information in relation to early procedures. The Council's research and consideration of points raised by the applicant had not found any new evidence to suggest that the footpath was added to the 1951 east Berkshire Definitive Map in error, as the applicant claimed. Forum Members highlighted that the path was considered to be of value and agreed with the view that this application should be declined.

Two applications were from the Open Spaces Society in relation to defining the widths of Sandhurst Footpath 21 and Crowthorne Footpath 8. The width of the path had been found to be 8 feet on the Crowthorne Parish Survey of 1951. The Open Spaces Society was querying the use of the area between the fence lines rather than the width of the way in use by members of the public. The Parks and Countryside Team would liaise with Parish and Town Councils as the path ran along the boundary.

Forum Members could forward any comments to Rose Wicks or Graham Pockett by the end of September 2011.

(Action: All)

7. **Thames Basin Heath and SANGS**

Forum Members received an update on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) and Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGs).

The protection of three species of ground nesting birds was important and there was a need to provide alternative recreational opportunities to reduce visitor pressure on the SPA. Bracknell Forest Council was producing a Supplementary Planning Document (updating the Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy) in relation to the Thames Basin Heath. There would be a consultation period on the public website between 12 September and 24 October 2011. A link to the consultation would be sent to Forum Members.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

There would be a key amendment to the previous strategy as the SPD set out the requirements for measures that cut across a multitude of planning authority areas,

specifically addressing strategic access management throughout the SPA. Measures would be implemented so as not to displace, for example, visitor or recreational use. Work would be undertaken collectively for onsite access for improvement measures.

There was a uniformed approach to securing funding for the improvements across all planning authorities involved. Hampshire County Council would act as “banker” for the funding to keep it central and Natural England were co-ordinating the work.

There would be improvements outside the Thames Basin Heath at a local level with open space mini management plans for sites including Ambarrow Court, Horseshoe Lake and Shepherd Meadows to make them more attractive for visitors (funded through S106 developer contributions). Reward money had been received from the government and capital payment had been ringfenced to also enable site improvements being undertaken at an early stage. Englemere Pond would be the next site for funding and improvements.

A question was raised about using public rights of way as SANGs. Money was being secured for linked improvements but PRow were not applicable as stand alone SANGs.

It was queried whether there was parking for horseboxes at Horseshoe Lake. There was a car park but it had a height restriction. Short term access could possibly be arranged via Hugh Fitzwilliams, but long term the height restrictions would remain in place to restrict access by caravans and to discourage flytipping etc.

It was suggested that a national map of potential and actual sites for parking for horseboxes would be useful and could contribute to the bridle path circuit. It was suggested that this would possibly be investigated further when the Riding in Bracknell Forest leaflet was revised. It was also suggested that SANGs could possibly be joined together to create longer linear routes.

8. **Green Flag Award**

Three sites in Bracknell Forest had been awarded Green Flag status:

- Lily Hill Park was visited by the Green Flag judges in May.
- Pope’s Meadow and Shepherd Meadows & Sandhurst Memorial Park may have been visited by a mystery shopper.
- The South Hill Park Steering Group would decide whether to enter the park for an award next year or to wait until 2013.

There had been photographs in the press regarding the awards.

The Parks and Countryside Team had undertaken a leaflet review. Leaflets on Discover Volunteering, Gardening for Wildlife, Discover Biodiversity and Parks and Countryside events had all been reprinted and distributed to libraries and the Look Out Discovery Centre. A new leaflet had been produced on Planning and Biodiversity Guidance which would provide useful information at an early stage of the planning application process. This would help to protect wildlife and prevent delays and associated costs to the applicant. The leaflet was available at Time Square and Easthampstead House receptions and would be uploaded to the Bracknell Forest Council public website.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

9. **2011 Annual LCAF Report**

Ideas in relation to the Annual Local Countryside Access Forum Report 2011 should be forwarded to Rose Wicks rose.wicks@bracknell-forest.gov.uk by the end of October 2011.

(Action: All)

10. **Site Visits**

A joint site visit had been undertaken to Englemere Pond and Swinley Park on 3 September 2011. The purpose of the site visit was to look at the management of these two sites which were designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Englemere Pond was also managed as a SANG. Combining two visits in one go and extending the invite out to the Biodiversity Forum had worked well and there was an aim to undertake more joint site visit walks in future.

It was suggested that a site visit be undertaken to Swinley Forest/ Crowthorne Woods to see how nature was regenerating there after the fires. The area would be restored over the next two years and it would be good to undertake walks before and after the restoration. John Deakin offered to lead this walk.

Forum Members should forward ideas for future site visits to Rose Wicks rose.wicks@bracknell-forest.gov.uk .

(Action: All)

11. **Reports from Officers**

Routes and Trees Competition

The photographic competition had been well-publicised in the local media and was likely to exceed the number of last year's entrants. The theme celebrated access to the great outdoors and marked the UN International Year of Forests 2011. The closing date for the competition was 30 September 2011.

Bracknell in Bloom

The Britain in Bloom regional entry was led this year by Bracknell Town Council, with support from Bracknell Regeneration Partnership and Bracknell Forest Council. There would be a presentation in Thames and Chiltern in Chesham and the outcome was awaited. The entry had been organised differently this year and concentrated more on long term planting projects rather than short term summer bedding.

Footpath 15

Bracknell Footpath 15 at Jennett's Park had been successfully diverted. The order had been confirmed and the confirmation notice was published in May. The footpath was now secure and could not be challenged. The developer had installed signage and included "Ramblers Route" finger posts where that route had been affected. The footpath was up and running through green corridors.

Footpath 20

Bracknell Footpath 20 had been closed for three months on a temporary traffic order from 9 May to 8 August 2011. Waitrose now owned the freehold and wished to erect a boardwalk made from recycled plastic which they would maintain.

Footpath 24

In relation to Sandhurst Footpath 24, there had been two 5 day closures in August 2011 for boardwalk extension works.

BFC Website

The Bracknell Forest Council website was in the process of being redesigned. The Register of Modification Order Applications and the Register of Deposit of Statement had been updated for the website.

A new access ramp had been erected at South Hill Park as part of the restoration. Chaucer Woods play area was targeting younger children and filling a provision need; the result of which had proved to be very popular.

12. **Reports from Members round the table**

Mike Abbott mentioned that councils could charge for road works. He asked that Forum Members think about how road works affect countryside routes for discussion at the next LCAF meeting.

It was reported that the New Roads and Street Works Act was a consultation document downloadable from the internet; it would apply to high priority traffic routes in the highway network and was unlikely to be applicable to rights of way.

Richard Mosses queried whether there was a list of permitted footpaths. It was reported that whilst some permitted paths could be mapped, not all landowners wanted paths on their land to be promoted more widely however some form of listing was agreed as being of benefit.

It was reported that there was a visitor's survey of open access sites in 2006 and this would be repeated and reassessed approximately every four years. Visitor count information was based on methodology that assumed seasonal variations, but the typical use of open spaces in Bracknell Forest was less affected by seasonality and more detailed analysis was required to provide valid statistics.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 27 March 2012, 7pm, Function Room, 5th Floor, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell.

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