

LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
27 MARCH 2007
(7.00 - 8.55 pm)

Present: Statutory Board Members
David Bertie
Celia Blay
Anne Haydon
Innes McEwan
Richard Mosses
Diana Pidgeon (Chairman)
Derick Stickler
Caroline Tomalin
Joe Dodson
Peter Radband

In attendance: Sally Coulson, Parks and Countryside Projects Officer, BFBC
Tina Stevenson, Democratic Services Officer, BFBC
Richard Walton, Parks and Countryside Manager, BFBC

Observers: Hugh Fitzwilliams, Rights of Way Ranger, BFBC
Nicola Harper, Natural England
Nicola Trafford, Natural England
John Winkley, Mid and West Berkshire LAF

Apologies for absence were received from:
James Dymond, Mike Gates, Iain McCracken and Stuart Tarrant

95. Welcome

Diana Pidgeon welcomed all members of the Forum to the meeting including Nicola Harper and Nicola Tarrant of Natural England who would be the new Support Officers for LAFs.

96. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2006 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Minute 54 referring to Minute 81 – “The New Valley Garden Centre” should read “The New Savill Garden Centre”.

97. New Local Access Forum Regulations and Guidelines

The Forum noted the new Regulations and Guidelines which it would consider in relation to later items on the agenda, as appropriate.

98. Future of the Forum

The Forum had a discussion around how it should operate in future. It was agreed that a combination of formal meetings supplemented by site visits as suggested in the new LAF guidance, would be a useful format to try for the next year. It was stressed

that the site visits should be relevant to issues being considered by the Forum and have a minimum attendance of six people. Potential dates for site visits were agreed as:

Tuesday 8 May 2007 at 5pm OR	} Site visit led by Derick Stickler Swinley Forest / Crown Estates
Thursday 10 May 2007 at 5pm	
Monday 6 August at 5pm	} Guided historical walk led by Celia Blay Binfield / Warfield Borders

It was agreed that Members be canvassed for preferences for dates and the details would be confirmed in due course. **(Action: Sally Coulson)**

In view of the minimum number for a site visit to be held, it was important that Forum Members respond promptly regarding attendance.

It was also agreed that the Forum would at its October meeting review how effective the site visits had been.

99. **Regional LAF Work**

- a) Central LAF Meeting – unfortunately the Forum had been unable to send representation, however issues highlighted in the minutes included:
 - Rural Speed Limits – the Forum was advised that LAFs should be negotiating with DEFRA with regard to modulation under S71 of the Highways Act and its provisions for margins for horse riders;
 - Car parking – the restricted height barriers on some car parks were an issue for horse riders who used horse boxes;
 - Thames Basin Heath SPA – the issue of mitigation was still unresolved;
 - Environmental Stewardship – again LAFs were being called upon to try and influence DEFRA with regard to an entry level scheme for the support and stewardship available to landowners and managers
 - Proliferation of way marking – better clarity and guidance was needed to avoid the layering of signs
 - North Hampshire Borders – the pathways were believed to be in poor condition, however project officers were now being funded via the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP), with areas such as Eversley being targeted for improvements. Details were requested about possible Parish & Town Council help with footpath maintenance, which could be obtained by contacting Sally Coulson.
- b) SE LAF Newsletter – well received and Natural England will continue to produce a newsletter on a 6 monthly basis. The newsletter is currently being revised in order to enable LAF members to network with others, using bullet points and 150 words or less to include successes, problems, projects etc. Aim is to enable other members to learn from each others experiences. In addition there will be a themed lead article, written by a willing officer, which would be circulated for LAF comments to be summarised in the Newsletter. The themed article would be circulated in due course.
(Action: Sally Coulson)

- c) Regional Support for the LAF and role of the National Forum – The Forum was advised that Nicola Trafford would now be the first point of contact for the Regional Support provided by Natural England. Whilst the recent turnover of staff had resulted in a loss of expertise, it was anticipated that this would only be an issue in the short term. With regard to the National Forum, it was believed that this was soon to be re-established with a new name: English Recreation and Access Forum, however more detail of how it would function had yet to be made known.

100. **Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)**

- a) Horse Riding Leaflet – Forum Members were shown the new “Horse Riding in Bracknell Forest” leaflet which detailed bridleways, byways and restricted byways open to horse riders within the Borough. Feedback and comments on the leaflet should be made to Sally Coulson and the Forum agreed that this was a good start to the provision of information for horse riders locally.
- b) The Cut Riverside Path – the Forum discussed exactly what the intention/aspiration was with regard to this path. Issues such as potentially undermining work being done by local landowners for local wildlife and the cost of fencing and public liability insurance were all acknowledged as important. The Forum therefore agreed that it would be best to pursue joining the footpaths in the more urban parts of Bracknell Forest to make a riverside path. The Forum would also work to ensure the continuation of the path was built into the amenity plan for the urban extension planned in the North of the Borough.
- c) Winkfield Bridleway Creation – the Forum was advised that as part of an original planning scheme, there was an existing agreement which gave 25 years to establish a bridleway, however, as it stands, this would be a dead end bridleway. Consequently, there are three possible approaches to this issue to be considered:
 - i) Do nothing
 - ii) Continue to pursue the bridleway as a project and pursue identifying and establishing a connection to the wider access network
 - iii) Create the bridleway as a dead end bridleway

The Forum discussed the available options and considered the bridleway too important to do nothing. It identified that in the current circumstances, it would probably be very difficult to link the bridleway to the rest of the network. The Forum therefore agreed to pursue option three and pursue the bridleway as a dead end bridleway. Although it was acknowledged that there were difficulties managing a dead end route, it was hoped that in time the connection to the wider network could be pursued. The Forum therefore needed to investigate funding to establish the bridleway, possibly via S106 Funding.

- d) Programme of Work for 2007/2008 – the Parks and Countryside Manager advised the Forum that a process of identifying S106 Funding for recreational and green space continued and prioritising work projects had been completed. The proposed work programme for 2007/08 included:
 - £60,000 for the development of the Met Office site to include renewal of the play area at Deepfield Road
 - £85,000 to undertake habitat management works with the Wildlife Trust at Wildmoor Heath

- £10,000 to make improvements to the habitat at Chaucer Woods (between Wellington College and Crowthorne High Street)
- £20,000 to carry out surfacing improvements to the permissive bridleway at Horseshoe Lake
- £20,000 to undertake surfacing improvements on the Warfield area bridleway
- £24,000 to make surface improvements to the urban footpath in Sandhurst (Footpath 2)

Linked to this work was the issue of future funding of such work. The Local Development Framework (LDF) Spatial Planning Strategy was looking at strengthening the negotiating position of the planning authority to increase developer contributions for residential development which would be used towards areas of work such as the ROWIP and biodiversity action plans.

- e) Priory Fields Bridleway – the Forum was advised that improvements had been made to these playing fields using S106 money. The gates to the site remained closed at present to allow the reseeded site to establish and future additional development would be staggered. The next stage was work on the bridleway link from the car park to the Hedge Lane bridleway network, which was currently being costed and funding investigated. The timing of this work would depend upon the scale of the work required and consequent cost and a possible application for funding from Natural England was being considered. The Forum asked for details around where most of the funding for Parks and Countryside work came from and was advised that capital projects were generally funded by:
- S106 money
 - BFBC Capital Programme
 - Heritage Lottery Fund
- f) Definitive Map Review – the Forum was advised that Sally Coulson was still progressing this and it would be updated on this work in due course.

101. **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA)**

The Forum was updated on policy and delivery initiatives around the SPA. It was advised that BFBC in conjunction with other planning authorities, major landowners and other relevant organisations, had produced its own mitigation strategy with the aim of providing the required residential growth **and** enhance the value of the biodiversity within the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. At a practical level, it outlined a three tier approach:

- enhancing alternative recreational sites by looking at potential improvement works to sites outside the SPA area;
- ensuring the sustainable management of these alternative sites; and
- providing management improvements within and specific to the SPA in partnership with other organisations, for example scrub management.

On this basis, a number of alternative sites had been identified, including Larks Hill, Garth Meadows, The Cut, Horseshoe Lakes, Silver Green, Lily Hill Park and Ambarrow Court and Hill and mini improvement plans would be drawn up for each of the sites.

The first of these was for Horseshoe Lake with proposals for improvements totalling £148,000. The Forum was assured that Natural England was being consulted with during the development of this improvement plan to ensure it was in line with what was expected. Proposed improvement activities included:

- improvements to the existing path network
- surfacing improvements
- access improvements for the permissive bridleway
- replacement of stiles
- replacement of site furniture
- habitat and biodiversity improvements

Feedback from Natural England was due shortly and if positive, the next step was to seek developer contributions to undertake these improvements. The Plan was to encourage use of these alternative areas by making them more attractive and using positive marketing to attract users away from areas within the SPA.

102. Any other business

- a) Flooding/Sewerage Issues – the Forum was advised that the Environment Agency was surveying the Cut to check whether drainage work was required and Thames Water was photographing the internal sewage pipes with a report back due in May.
- b) DEFRA Consultations
 - The Forum noted the Natural England proposals for improving coastal access and the DEFRA consultation due on these
 - The Forum was advised that new guidance had been issued in November 2006 which has simplified the range of tasks which could now be done in relation to byelaws at officer level via DEFRA. It was also helpful because it identified where areas may have in the past been considered for byelaws, the alternative legislative options available
- c) The Ranger team was currently being trained to issue fixed penalty notices for litter dropping
- d) The need for a path linking Ascot Station and Kings Ride was highlighted. It appeared that much of the land concerned was owned by the NHS and the Forum agreed that approaches be made to Windsor and Maidenhead to see if this could be progressed. **(Action: Sally Coulson)**

103. Date of next meeting

Potential date for next meeting: Tuesday 25th September 2007 (TBC)
(Action: Sally Coulson)

CHAIRMAN