

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
1 OCTOBER 2013
7.00 - 9.10 PM**



Present:

Members:

Mr Michael Abbott (Chairman)
Councillor Michael Brossard
John Deakin
Councillor John Porter
Mr Peter Radband
Mrs Jenny Yung

In attendance:

Hugh Fitzwilliams, Rights of Way Ranger, BFC
Graham Pockett, Parks & Countryside Development Officer
Amanda Roden, Democratic Services Officer
Richard Walton, Head of Parks & Countryside
Rose Wicks, Parks & Countryside Projects Officer

Apologies for absence were received from:

Sharon Holt
Mr Innes McEwen
Mr Richard Mosses
Ian Pittock, Mid & West Berkshire LAF

1. **Welcome**

2. **Election of Chairman**

Michael Abbott was elected as Chairman of the Forum.

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2013 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 16: In relation to the national Local Access Forum (LAF) conference in Sheffield, no one had attended from the Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum (LCAF).
- Minute 16: Third paragraph: There was no definitive guidance regarding the mid-term review as Bracknell Forest were one of first local authorities to produce their Rights of Way Improvement Plan, and so the first to review it.
- Minute 17: This was the second consolidated Definitive Map and Statement of the Public Rights of Way for Bracknell Forest.
- Minute 18: An addition: Information panels were being designed at the time.
- Minute 20: The site visit in relation to Queenswood would be removed from the list.

4. **Membership and Recruitment**

Recruitment was needed and a poster had been distributed to the Parish and Town Councils in Bracknell Forest for their notice boards.

It was suggested that posters could also be distributed to conservation groups in the area, The Look Out, Swinley Forest User Group, Libraries for their TV screens showing information, and Bracknell Forest Council's Facebook and Twitter.

5. **National and Regional LAF Work**

Bracknell LCAF members were not able to attend the national LAF conference but feedback from the conference was on the Natural England website. Issues discussed at the conference included: working with volunteers, urban LAFs, multi-user routes, LAF involvement with Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), how LAFs could better engage with the health agenda, planning issues, facilitating disabled access, Huddle, Open Access, impacts of cuts on rights of way management, Green Infrastructure, and Paths for Communities.

Link to further information regarding the Local Access Forum National Conference 2013: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/7685821> .

Richard Mosses, Cllr Michael Brossard and Peter Radband attended the regional LAF conference in May which was well represented by members from other LAFs.

Peter Radband had attended a Mid and West Berkshire neighbouring LAF meeting which had a comprehensive agenda and could last for up to four hours. There was more involvement from members at this LAF, with members required to attend neighbouring LAF meetings and report back. There was a Rights of Way Improvement Group, led by Adrian Lawson, and sub committees to make recommendations if there were issues. A subject for discussion included possible improvements in the area of cyclists on the road.

Peter suggested that LCAF members consider having a cycling forum to advise on planning issues. There were no safe cycling routes into Bracknell Forest, for example, from Bagshot. This would be investigated further with Phil Burke, Travel Plan Co-ordinator.

(Action: Graham Pockett/ Rose Wicks)

Michael Abbott and Richard Mosses had attended a Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (RBWM) LAF meeting (report on page 9 of the agenda papers).

If LCAF members were interested in attending neighbouring LAF meeting, the details could be found on the websites of the authorities (examples below):

- Hampshire Countryside Access Forum: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/hcaf>
- Surrey LAF: <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/environment-housing-and-planning/countryside/explore-surreys-countryside/visit-the-countryside/footpaths-byways-and-bridleways/surrey-countryside-access-forum>
- Mid & West Berkshire LAF: <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=8904>
- Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead LAF: http://www.rbwm.gov.uk/web/prow_local_access_forum.htm
- Slough LAF: <http://www.slough.gov.uk/parking-travel-and-roads/slough-local-access-forum.aspx>

Peter Radband, Cllr Michael Brossard, Graham Pockett and Rose Wicks were signed up to Huddle. It would be useful to have a source of help for using Huddle and this would be investigated further.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

Annie English was the new contact at the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership.

DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) were running a Consultation from 5 September 2013 to 7 November 2013 on Biodiversity Offsetting in England: https://consult.defra.gov.uk/biodiversity/biodiversity_offsetting . Dan Carpenter, Biodiversity Officer was the best contact for more information regarding this.

The Forum noted the letter from Richard Benyon MP of 3 September 2013.

6. **Definitive Map and Statement Review**

The Definitive Map and Statement Review had been completed and information regarding this was available online. The online version was not the legal record but a good reference copy. The aim was to showcase the maps in a display case. The Map and Statement would be available for inspection at Time Square Reception and Bracknell Central Library; one would also be used as a working copy by Bracknell Forest Council (BFC).

7. **Access Improvement Works**

Permitted path proposal for Long Hill Road

This would connect to Winkfield Footpath 20 to form a north to south link with the existing permitted path leading to London Road. There was a bank with a line of steps cleared through vegetation. There was a four metre change in level through dense vegetation so a ramp would be difficult to erect and steps were considered to be a good solution for this area and were currently under construction. From London Road to Long Hill Road there would be 0.4 miles of paths through the woodland strip. It was possible that this path might be dedicated in future to make it part of the Rights of Way network. Construction of the steps was sponsored by Ward Councillor Tony Virgo.

Parks and Open Spaces Quality Improvements Programme

Projects in Phase 1 of this programme which were funded by developer contributions, had been approved and were included in the Capital Programme. Quality improvements were being carried out to woodland, parks and open spaces and play areas.

Phase 1 sites included Westmorland Park, Snaprails Park and a multi-user path next to Turnberry play area.

Improvements would soon be carried out at Westmorland Park to bring it up to Green Flag Award status. Paths would be upgraded and new paths built to improve circulation and to better link the different parts of the park. New wildflower meadow areas would be established to promote biodiversity. There would be ornamental planting and new interpretation and site signs.

In Snaprails Park, wooden footbridges had been installed and new path links created. Other quality improvements due to be carried out included restoration of the leat /

stream embankments, vegetation clearance to improve the views of the pond, a new planting scheme and improved surveillance. There had been vandalism in the past in this area but not since the improvements had been made.

At Turnberry, Bracknell Town Council had proposed a scheme to surface a multi-user path from the allotments off South Road to meet the existing cyclepath from Turnberry to the grounds of Easthampstead Park School.

Phase 2 projects were being considered; these included Bracknell Town Council projects at Mill Park (Wildridings and Central) and Calfridus Way Recreation Ground (Harmans Water), and Binfield Parish Council project at Binfield Cricket Club, which included works to improve the existing pavilion facilities.

Information about the Bracknell Town Council projects could be found at this link: <http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/documents/s67146/Phase%20%20Parks%20and%20Open%20Space%20Quailty%20Improvements%20-%20Backnell%20Town%20Council.pdf>

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs)

A new site entrance notice board and interpretation panel, including a new site map had been installed at Englemere Pond. New waymarked trails had been established using red and blue waymarkers; blue for the dragonfly trail and red for the shorter and more accessible woodpecker trail. There was evidence that photo orienteering had already taken place with students at the site. John Deakin and other forum members thanked everyone involved in the improvements at Englemere Pond.

Preparations were being made to carry out substantial path improvement works at Shepherd Meadows. Three paths to the north and south of the Blackwater River, including one which led from the main bridge would be locally raised and resurfaced in order to help reduce the effects of seasonal flooding.

Liaison would be undertaken with the Environment Agency regarding SANGs improvements at the design stage and there would be joined up work with Hampshire County Council regarding funding and work undertaken on Rights of Way which cross county and authority borders.

Kissing gates had been installed on Winkfield Footpath 9 funded by the South East Ramblers. These helped facilitate better access than the stiles that were there before and helped fulfil actions identified in the Rights of Way Improvements Plan. Surface and drainage work would be undertaken in Ashmore Lane. The gates had all been renewed at Horseshoe Lake. Steps had been rebuilt in Maybrick Close, after being removed by the landowner owing to concerns over their safety.

8. **LCAF Annual Report**

There were two versions of the LCAF Annual Report: A glossy version for 2012 was being finalised and would be uploaded to the BFC website; and an official spreadsheet version, for period April 2012 to March 2013 which would need to be submitted to Natural England by end of October 2013. The new template would be used and Forum members would be contacted for their feedback.

(Action: Rose Wicks/ All)

9. **Site Visits**

The Jennett's Park site visit had to be postponed. Suggested future days for site visits included Saturday morning or Friday. There would be a combined site visit with the Biodiversity Forum.

Previous suggestions for site visits included:

- The Crown Estate; visit to see new bike trails;
- Jennett's Park; creation of new footpaths;
- Shepherd Meadows; bank restoration and path upgrade;
- South Hill Park; new waymarked trails;
- Jealott's Hill Farm; Forum members invited by Innes McEwan to visit the farm;
- Broadmoor/ Foresters Way; possible affect of new hospital access road to the Public Rights of Way network.

Innes McEwan would be contacted regarding a possible visit to Jealott's Hill Farm.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

Further suggestions for site visits included: Tarman's Copse where the developer was due to take measures to improve the site in preparation for it being transferred across to council ownership and Westmorland Park after the site quality improvements had been completed.

Work had been completed to improve signage and interpretations at South Hill Park. The site was up for a Barley Award for the best local authority park in the region.

Peter suggested that it would be interesting to know what inspectors looked for when considering Green Flag Award status. It was suggested that Forum members could be involved in the quality checks undertaken by the Parks and Countryside Service.

(Action: Graham Pockett/ Richard Walton)

The time involved in such work would depend on the level of interest but one site audit usually took a couple of hours. A fresh perspective on sites would be useful. Volunteers for this should contact Rose Wicks.

(Action: All)

10. **Reports from Officers**

Graham Pockett reported on the proposal by South East Water (SEW) to install a 5.5km pipeline which would mostly run through Swinley Forest. Members discussed the likely impact this would have on pedestrian access on Crown Estate Land, in particular the potential for interruption to the new bike trails. There was an exhibition on the Swinley Forest Pipeline Scheme at the Hilton Hotel on Wednesday 2 October, 4.30pm to 7.30pm and Rose had further information regarding this.

Scottish and Southern Electric (SSE) had applied to temporarily close Bracknell Footpath 6, off Longshot Lane in order to conduct trial borehole works. SSE had contributed half the cost to the temporary closure this public right of way (PROW).

Rose Wicks reported on the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order application received from SEW to temporarily close a Byway Open to All Traffic in Sandhurst, in order to conduct a mains replacement. Work was due to be carried out in phases along Yorktown Road and Brookside Road. Sandhurst Byway 16 ran along Brookside and would need to be temporarily closed between December 2013 and February 2014 whilst this work was undertaken. A diversion would need to be in place during this

time. The proposed diversion, submitted with the application, would run along Wellington Road and then Yorktown Road which would mean walking along busy main roads and past a busy road junction. An alternative route was proposed along Park Road which ran parallel to Brookside Road. It was thought that this route would be less disruptive.

It was another successful year for the borough, with several parks and open spaces achieving Green Flag Awards.

Newly restored South Hill Park received a Green Flag Award for the first time this year, with Lily Hill Park achieving the award for the last six years. For both sites this was a condition of the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund investment.

Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park retained Green Flag status for the tenth year running. The neighbouring sites located in south Sandhurst on the Blackwater River were strengthened by the joint working of Bracknell Forest Council and Sandhurst Town Council.

Pope's Meadow, a parkland forming part of the former residence of the renowned poet Alexander Pope, was the first site in Berkshire to receive a Green Flag Award and had won the award every year since 2001.

Other sites in the Borough area awarded Green Flags were Jocks Lane (Bracknell Town Council), Carnation Hall and Locks Ride Recreation Ground (Winkfield Parish Council).

Further information can be found via this link:
<http://greenflag.keepbritaintidy.org/awards/green-flag-award/>

Richard Walton thanked Hugh for his valued work over the years. Hugh Fitzwilliams would be retiring as Public Rights of Way Ranger for Bracknell Forest Council, after having dedicated many years to maintaining and improving the PROW network in the Borough. Hugh would continue to work in a voluntary capacity and it had been suggested that Hugh's vast experience and knowledge in relation to the Borough's PROW and open access would be invaluable to LCAF and that he therefore might want to apply to become a member of the Forum in his own right. There had been a number of strong applicants for Hugh's role and the aim was to replace his post quickly. Hugh had kindly offered to help train the new ranger who took on his former duties.

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

John Deakin had been in contact with South East Water regarding the Swinley Forest Pipeline Scheme. There was a need for SEW to be rigorous in the management of the scheme and more robust in the restoration of the area. John was due to meet with SEW this month and thought that the consultation period might be extended. A quick resolution was sought for the scheme to be passed and local interests to be protected. When there were water supply issues, water could be pumped around and between reservoirs.

There would be mountain biking development for investment in relation to managing where people accessed the Special Protection Area, rather than people using all over the SPA. Rangers had been tasked with thinking of pedestrian access in Swinley Forest and an accessibility route to manage where people walked.

Michael Abbott mentioned, in the absence of Richard Mosses, Hedge Lane and Priory Lane linking to Larks Hill across Newell Green. These would not be actively promoted until people could safely cross the road.

Peter Radband mentioned that cycling had increased along Nine Mile Ride due to the car parking charges at The Look Out and Coral Reef. In Peter's opinion this was a dangerous road for cyclists to ride along and asked whether Bracknell Footpath 22 that ran adjacent to it, could be upgraded to include a permissive cycle route as this would also aid congestion on the road.

It was reported by Borough Council officers who managed the site that ran alongside Nine Mile Ride that surface improvements were undertaken along the footpath each year to improve public access. The footpath ran along a narrow woodland strip and putting in a non-permeable surface would have a negative impact on the trees so there would need to be permeable treatments. Hugh reported that cycling was not so common on this road as thought and that he would be concerned about providing signage along this footpath, as it could give cyclists the misconception that all footpaths could be cycled on, when in fact cycling was prohibited on footpaths. It was suggested by the Borough Council officers that cyclists could continue to use Bracknell Footpath 22 as a kind of permissive access, but there was some reluctance to publicise this.

The possibility of a survey of cyclists' use of Nine Mile Ride would be explored, to determine whether this was an issue that needed to be investigated further.

(Action: Graham Pockett/ Rose Wicks)

Michael Abbott queried whether Lapland UK running at Christmas for three months would also possibly look to apply to run at other times of the year, during key holidays such as Easter. Michael Brossard who was Vice Chairman of the BFC Planning Committee advised that applications were considered on the basis of merits and for any other time, there would need to be a fresh planning application. There had been no indication that there was a wish to extend the period; John Deakin advised that the organisation specialised in Christmas entertainment for children and a new licence would need to be applied for to operate outside of this timeframe. It was unlikely that The Crown Estate would give permission for the site to be used during the summer period seeing as this would be during ground nesting bird's season.

Cllr Michael Brossard mentioned that it was important to raise awareness of the need for dog owners and walkers to pick up after their dogs. There was a code of conduct leaflet which was being handed out to dog walkers and owners. This had been popular and the Environment Warden at Bracknell Town Council had requested some more of these leaflets. The leaflet was also available to download online via the Bracknell Forest Council website <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/dog-owners-and-walkers-code-of-conduct-leaflet.pdf> . Peter Radband queried how many dog walkers had been fined in the last year. It was thought that responsible dog ownership was well publicised and good work was being undertaken by the six parish and town councils regarding this.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 4 March 2014, 7pm, Function Room, 5th Floor, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell.