

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
26 JUNE 2018
7.00 - 9.00 PM**



Present:

Members:

Peter Radband (Chairman)
Richard Mosses (Vice-Chairman)
Colin Bird
Councillor Michael Brossard
John Deakin
Hugh Fitzwilliams
Simon Yates
Jenny Yung

In attendance:

Stephen Chown, Head of Parks and Countryside
Graham Pockett, Parks & Countryside Development Manager
Rose Wicks, Parks & Countryside Project Officer

Observers:

Geoff Paxton, Winkfield Parish Council

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mike Abbott
Richard Elsbury
Councillor Alvin Finch
Colin Patient, Mid & West Berks LAF
Robert Solomon, Ranger (Countryside and PROW)

83. Welcome

The chairman welcomed Members to the meeting and Geoff Paxton from Winkfield Parish Council

84. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a correct record subject to the below changes:

Page 3, item 73 – the date would be changed to 2017.

Page 4, the words carry out would be changed to investigate.

Arising from the minutes, an update on 'Devil's highway' would be given later in the meeting.

85. ROWIP2

Work was ongoing to finish the design of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2 (ROWIP2) and it was close to being finalised. Due to GDPR regulations, a new picture would be taken of LCAF members as the current one was over two years old. Members confirmed they were happy for their photograph to be used in the publication, which would be distributed as hard copies and made available online.

It was noted that a big publicity campaign would be done to celebrate the launch of the new publication.

An update was given on the actions completed so far:

ROW for all:

- A map showing furniture (e.g. step-over stiles) and accessibility was being created which would be made available to the public as an online map on BFCs website. Volunteer Path Wardens were collecting the data as part of their BVPI monitoring of Rights of Way and this was then being captured on GIS.. The map would also include dates of when it was updated so improvements carried out over time could be monitored.
- The P&C rangers and volunteers (e.g. South East Berkshire Ramblers) continue to work in partnership to improve the accessibility and Rights of Way. This includes removing inaccessible squeeze and step-over stiles and where appropriate installing accessible pedestrian / bridle gates.. Path surfaces had also continued to be improved. The forum was informed about the replacement of the bridge at Shepherd Meadows. The new bridge has been designed to be more accessible to the public and it is hoped that it would last a long time. The additional path works carried out to further improve accessibility at this site is part of SANG improvement works.
- The new kissing gates at Wildmoor Heath were mentioned as being less accessible than what is usually desired. It was noted that the boardwalks had normal accessible pedestrian gates on the other side, which meant that those with disabilities could travel to the end and have to turn around due to the reduced access. It was confirmed that it was the landowner who installed the gates and it would be their responsibility to address this, a fact which would be recorded.

(Action: Graham Pockett to contact Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) about the kissing gate and about the potential to add a sign on the other end of the footpath advising users about the reduced access of the kissing gate)

It was reported that there had been some improvements carried out to Allsmoor Lane to make it more accessible. New surfaced paths had been created at Pope's Meadow to improve access at this Green Flag Award winning site and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). Both of these improvements were delivered using s106 funding.

An update was given on Devil's Highway following a report at the last meeting that the surface of the Restricted Byway (RB) was in a poor state of repair and was almost impassable in places. This particularly applied to the section of the RB that allowed access to the Crown Estate owned car park, which was being damaged by heavy motorised vehicular use.

A meeting had taken place between The Crown Estate and Bracknell Forest Council to discuss how to best address this issue. It was noted that historically this was a Forestry Commission car park and the issue of the degrading surface (of both the RB and the car park) was a long-standing and costly issue to address. The Crown Estate gave justification of why providing access to Crowthorne Forest from this location was detrimental to the condition of the Special Protection Area (SPA). In light of these

points both parties agreed that they should close access to motorised vehicles along this section of RB, which would mean also closing the car park. They acknowledged that there was demand for parking access in this area, which would be addressed via a new public car park being provided as part of the TRL SANG development. The new car park is off Old Wokingham Road and there's space for around 20 cars. The closing of the current facilities would coincide with the opening of the new car park at the end of July.

It was noted that fly-tipping and littering was also an issue in this location which could be addressed by restricting vehicular access. The Crown Estate would spend 2 days each year litter picking here, as well as the Crown Estate Rangers regularly picking up fly-tipped waste.

Surface improvements

The restricted byway will be restored to its intended function by narrowing the width and improving the surface of the right of way. Encouraging vegetation on the margins will improve the rural character. Hoggins from the closed car park could be used to create an improved surface for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

It was confirmed that the new surface would be suitable for its intended users, including horse drawn carriages. It was legally permissible to take a carriage down that that section but the first stage would be to design a mechanism to prevent motorised vehicles but allow horse drawn carriages. Talks were ongoing with local landowners to see if this could happen.

It was noted that progress was moving forward in partnership between The Crown Estate and the Council in a cost effective way.

Residents would not be able to walk out of the SANG but the SANG will have a new a varied walk.

It was emphasised that any decisions taken recently by The Crown Estate have not been specifically to restrict access to recreational opportunities, but to address issues caused by informal parking in and around Crown Estate land. For example, informal parking and increased number of visitors was causing potential public safety issues and was adding increasing pressures on the SPA.

Routes and Links

A path had been proposed at Cabbage Hill SANG which would go to Hazelwood Lane. Currently the only way to get between two sites is along Forest Road and there are no safe grass verges to walk on.. Thames Water own land north of Forest Road that could accommodate a permissive path which would also give access opportunities to the northern areas of Bracknell. There would be some furniture work to be done and some signs to highlight pedestrians crossing to make it safer.

It was noted that this had been looked into previously by Graham Pockett and Thames Water were initially supportive but had not made progress with the land. Thames Water were also starting to think about the commercial value of the area which meant that although the path could be permissible, it would not necessarily be permanent.

The current Biodiversity Officer Iain Crump would be contacted by Graham Pockett.
(Action: Graham Pockett)

It was questioned whether Warfield Parish Council and LCAF would help encourage it along.

It was noted that there were no horse facilities at the Cabbage Hill end of the route which should be approached with caution therefore it would be a footpath and cycle path only. The possibility of creating a bridleway on the edge of Cabbage Hill SANG to West End Lane should be investigated to give a through route between existing bridleways and quiet lanes.

It was confirmed that LCAF supported the action listed above and would send a letter to Thames Water. From experience, results had been positive after writing to the Chief Executive and this approach would be taken. A copy would also be sent to the Biodiversity officer.

(Action: Colin Bird)

Information and marketing

So far there had been 10 publicised ranger led walks and publicity for national bike week. The publicity included highlighting how cycle ways link open spaces.

Request was made by Colin Bird for BFC to advertise the WOW! Week of Walks, which are organised by The Bracknell Forest Society

Hugh Fitzwilliams was currently leading rambler walks on Tuesdays. The opportunity to brand these walks as being led by LCAF was discussed.

It was suggested that appointing a social media champion on the Forum would help LCAF and BFC to identify and promote local recreation and access opportunities. Colin Bird offered to take on this position and he will provide relevant updates to Rose Wicks.

(Action: Colin Bird and Rose Wicks)

It was noted that Phil Burke would be delivering a cycle event on 28 June at Waitrose with free MOTs for bicycles and would include a bike which blends smoothies by pedalling.

Responsible Use:

The concerns regarding the issue of fly-tipping along Hazelwood Lane was discussed. The section of the Bridleway is an access track for Thames Water vehicles to the sewage treatment plant. Thames Water had initially requested that BFC clear the latest fly-tips, but BFC had presented them with historic evidence that Thames Water had agreed it was their responsibility to address this issue, as it was the vehicular access that was leading to the problem. Thames Water had informed BFC that they were going to install electronic bollards which would allow for their vehicles, and to users of the bridleway, but would prevent unauthorised use of the bridleway by fly-tippers.

Preserve Rural Character

Avery Lane was going to be crossed by a new road leading to the new Newell Green housing development. This would cross the middle of the byway so a traffic regulation order would be put in place to stop motorised vehicles using it and give a proper waiting area for horses by the road with a carefully designed crossing.

Watersplash lane would also be closed to vehicles and there will be a temporary diversion put in place by Redrow for the duration of the construction works and it would then will reopen the RoW to cyclists pedestrians and horse riders following completion.

It was recommended that messages should be circulated via social media as this would be a temporary measure and a permanent solution would be put in place as part of a long term plan.

This was looking to happen in around 6-8 weeks once the order was in place.

It was noted that updates on how development will affect Bridleway 26 (Hedge Lane) would be reported on at the next LCAF meeting.

Policy 7

The Forum was shown new cycle way pictures by Amen Corner North which now had disabled access.

Policy 8

Colin had attended a meeting set up by P&C senior ranger Chris Swatridge, that proposed the idea of setting up a new Bracknell Forest Green Spaces Forum. A talk was given by the chairman of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces on this matter. The feeling was that, that there had been a slightly disappointing turn out at this event. Most people who did attend were already part of environmental or conservation volunteer groups who already had a good network of contacts. The attendees took away an action to create a distribution and communication list, but enthusiasm was limited.

It was noted that the Forum could be a good platform for communicating between council activities, The Crown Estate and volunteer groups to tell them what is going on e.g. changes to footpaths.

There wasn't much co-ordination between voluntary groups currently and the Forum could improve this.

(Action: Steven would follow-up with Chris Swatridge)

Policy 9

The LCAF recruitment leaflet was being continued and Rose would keep distributing as much as possible.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

86. **PROW and Local Developments**

An update was given on the new Broadmoor SANG and local developments. The NHS trust had confirmed there were some sites being allocated for housing and they were putting new SANGS in the area. This would include a Cricketfield Grove SANG. There would be also be 2 sports pitches not included in the SANG and a car park. It includes woodland and varied landscape and a brook with some bridges. Currently being built and would be open soon.

It was questioned whether the developers building the SANG have any responsibility for publicising and it was confirmed they would to local residents. They would also be added to local SANGS.

The Forum was shown the footpath map for the new SANG.

87. **Reports from Meetings and Site Visits**

Peter Radband had organised for members to Wellington College grounds. The visit was scheduled for 7pm, on 17 July 2018 and would be similar to the previous visit in this location. Members who wanted to attend were asked to email Peter.

(Action: All)

Members were asked for ideas for site visits.

Graham Pockett would lead a site visit to Bucklers Forest SANG with a date suggested for August which would include a guided tour with the landscape architect.

Hugh Fitzwilliam's would also do a visit to the new SANG in Warfield.

There were also plans to visit Easthampstead Park to see what potential that held for a site visit.

Members were asked to consider ideas for future site visits.

88. **Annual Report**

Natural England (NE) was contacted regarding position on producing annual reports that need to be submitted to them. The 2017 report had been published on BFC's website and sent to Natural England who thanked LCAF for its production.

Natural England would not expect an annual report form for this year and they unfortunately didn't have time to look at them but there will be an annual report with pictures for the website.

89. **Horizon Scanning**

Steven Chown presented to the Forum an informal update from Parks & Countryside service.

It was noted that the Council has big savings targets to meet as part of the transformation programme. Local green spaces were the area which was most loved by Bracknell residents and it was important to other aspects of councils agenda including public health that these are protected.

It was confirmed that £400k of savings needed to be found in total, however it was acknowledged that the department had a greatest potential to earn income from new services.

The council would also look to work with other partners to deliver services and encourage people to join in and volunteer. This would include working with partners to apply for grant funding as a collective.

It was acknowledged that where the department was adding income generating services, they would need to provide a better service in exchange for the charge. The number of staff would stay the same which would provide challenges however efficiencies were being found so there was time for income generating projects.

The strategic options proposed were:

- Income generating options included: chargeable car park facilities, access to parks for commercial dog walkers, and catering vans
- Minimisation of land management costs through volunteering and sponsorship
- It was noted that the public were supportive of issuing fines to people who misuse open spaces. The fines would not generate income however if it could improve behaviour which would mean less costs and less staff time. Any surplus would be put towards good causes.
- Members had supported developing Horseshoe Lake as a Country park which would provide more opportunities for people to access the park. This would

include the addition of a café, a more focused water sports offer, a cycle area and a play area to educate about the outdoors and nesting birds. Happy that RSPB Reserve visitors will have access to facilities.

- Concerns were raised that roadside walking would be dangerous and questions were raised to see if this could be improved. It was noted that this detail had not been considered yet but the traffic management study would consider access.
- £333K savings had already been committed for 2017-2018 with the bulk of savings made from changes to charges made to developers. Currently developers paid money to enhance and maintain local green spaces but nothing towards facilitation of the scheme as a whole which was now being charged for.
- A huge amount of contaminated grass is generated within the Borough but a biomass burner which would generate heat for the new building at Horseshoe Lake.
- Hay would be stock piled to heat the building for the rest of the year
- The potential to kiln dry wood in the future was also being explored. It was hoped that it would be a volunteer led business in processing the wood and charcoal kiln

John Deakin happy to collaborate regarding wood products in future and share contacts if required.

- SANGS are providing significant income through the development process and would continue with work with the local plan.
- Trying to unify the number of sites and to provide a more seamless approach over time.

Other future projects include:

- Highway trees – offering tree pruning solutions to the public, rather than giving just the statutory responsibility to householder, to reduce risk to the highway.
- Could possibly work with ROW
- Utility companies would be charged more consistently for their use of public land.
- Street trading licenses would be introduced by targeting car parks with the most antisocial behaviour as legitimate businesses provided more scrutiny.
- There would be a nominal charge where staff time is involved in Ranger led walks. However in future the department would look for grant money to fund these events.
- The results of a survey meant had shown that - 74% of people wanted a country park, 86% agreed with commercial sponsorship and 71% agreed with fixed penalty notices.

90. **Any Other Business**

Rose Wicks

It was confirmed that there was potential to get Jenny Yung set up on Huddle as there were spare licenses.

(Action: Rose to liaise with NE to get Jenny set up on Huddle and to organise training for her)

The forum were encouraged to have a look at images on walls outside the council chamber as the pictures were of local parks and open spaces. Some of the images were from past Parks Photography competitions. This year BFC were joining forces with the Economic and Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) to run the new competition themed – “A great place to grow”. The competition was to have a wider remit than previously, featuring new aspects such as jobs and economy.

Rose would also circulate a publication to members, about Walking in Urban parks and Greenspaces. This publication was the subject of a news report at South Hill Park..

(Action: Rose to circulate)

It was also requested that any examples of progress made towards delivering actions in the RoWIP be sent to Rose.

(Action: all)

John Deakin

There was a request for input from the Thames Basin Heath Partnership on their activities to be added to next meeting agenda.

Jenny Yung

The importance of advertising the positive things around the borough was highlighted as there was a lot to be positive about. It was confirmed that BFC social media channels could be further used to publicise good news stories.

Geoff Paxton

North Ascot has The Three Castles footpath which crosses bridleway – impossible to cross bridge safely on foot. Could a footbridge be provided next to the road bridge? If the local area is developed then there was feedback that the bridge should be redeveloped. The mechanism would be Infrastructure Delivery Plan which would support development.

Stephen to check with planning team if there is a solution in the new IDP and if not, explore whether there's scope to develop this as a project that can be used to secure future development money. P&C have been working with BFC planning to design a new template that can be used to collect future projects such as these.

(Action: Stephen Chown)

Could CIL money be used?

Richard Mosses

Richard offered to lead a walk for the LCAF members.

(Action: Richard to send Rose details)

91. **Public Question Time**

There were no questions from members of the public

92. **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 2 October 2018.

CHAIRMAN