

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
9 JUNE 2020
6.00 - 8.00 PM**



Present:

Members:

Colin Bird (Chairman)
Richard Mosses (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Michael Brossard
Richard Elsbury
Councillor Alvin Finch
Hugh Fitzwilliams
David Warren
Jenny Yung

In attendance:

Graham Pockett, Parks & Countryside Development Manager
Chris Swatridge, Senior Ranger
Rose Wicks, Parks & Countryside Project Officer

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mike Abbott
Geoff Paxton
Stephen Chown, Head of Parks and Countryside
Robert Solomon, Ranger (Countryside and PROW)

151. Welcome and Apologies

The forum would benefit from a new representative from The Crown Estate to sit on the forum. Hugh would raise this with the contact he was due to meet soon.

(Action: Hugh Fitzwilliams)

It was noted that the forum hadn't heard from their new member, who joined late last year. It was agreed that she should be contacted to check she was ok and if there was anything that she needed to help better facilitate her time on the forum.

(Action: BFC Democratic Services)

152. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting of the Forum held on the 4 February 2020 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amends.

Point 140, change reference from Wellers Lane to Church Lane.
Point 148, change reference to South East Berkshire Ramblers.

The action points from the minutes not included elsewhere on the agenda were reviewed and progress/ updates noted. Members/officers noted how the coronavirus pandemic had significantly impacted on being able to deliver of many of the actions.

- The proposed site visits to Bucklers Forest SANG and the Blue Mountain SANG were put on hold, and the forum would look at these again when safe to do so.
- Work on the mapping of path furniture remains in abeyance while Rose is on extended secondment with the comms team. To carry forward to next meeting.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

- Colin has made some progress with the work to create a list of RoW improvements and suggestions for the creation of new paths, recreational routes and links. For example, getting routes added to the Definitive Map. There are nine suggestions currently on the list, which Colin will provide so they're distributed with the meeting minutes.

(Action: Chair/Rose Wicks)

- Action on publicity around new SANGs opening, keeping website news items up to date and more use of social media. There has been a huge surge in people using outdoor spaces for fresh air and exercise, which has been putting pressure on facilities. Comms messages have been focused on COVID-19 and the need for safe and responsible use of local parks and countryside. This action to be carried forward.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

- David Warren was contacted by Nicola Greenwood about promoting local routes and events connected to horse riding. Nicola sits on the Mid and West Berks LAF and is an access and bridleway officer in the BHS. David Warren to liaise with Jenny Young about how we can promote horse riding in Bracknell Forest.

(Action: Jenny Yung and David Warren)

- It should be possible to make a creation agreement to formalise the designation of the bridleway at Horseshoe Lake. The timing hasn't been the best while the site is currently very busy, so this action needs to be carried forward.

(Action: Graham Pockett to add to future work programme)

- The Chair had deferred calling a get together to discuss, review and grade accessible routes in the Borough. One of the suggestions had been a proposed route through Garth Meadows. To put on hold until a site meeting can be set up, starting from Quelm Lane.

(Action: Chair)

- The sub-regional neighbouring LAF Chairs meeting proposed would be impractical to do in person given the current circumstances, but Graham Pockett would look at setting this up via Microsoft Teams. It worked effectively for the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) meeting he attended.

(Action: Graham Pockett)

- The proposal to seek an access to SANG 2 at Church Lane once all the land required was in the ownership of the Council should be added to the spreadsheet of suggested new routes.

(Action: Chair/Graham Pockett)

- Crowthorne FP 8 on the Broadmoor Estate – proposal to replace steel stiles with more accessible furniture. Still no response to enquiries sent to North West London Mental Health Trust. Carry this action forward.
(Action: Chair/Graham Pockett)
- Hugh extended his congratulations to whoever is responsible for improving accessibility of the FPs in Warfield, by removing scissor stiles. Rob Solomon has been doing a lot of work on this.
- Members discussed the path alongside the Blue Mountain SANG, which was having significant drainage issues, being caused by the nearby earthworks. This was being investigated with the Drainage Engineer and developer, including whether any conditions of planning permission had yet to be met regarding provision of the SANG, before any proposals for improvements were brought. BFC were also looking at an improvement project to FP10, using s106 funding, that would improve accessibility and links.
- Ambarrow path diversion – the new dedicated path is now a RoW on the Definitive Map. Signage needed to be completed, and action in this regard was slowed due to COVID-19. (Post-meeting note: Work completed on 22/06/2020)
(Action: Graham Pockett)
- Volunteer walks wouldn't continue, which was a decision taken before COVID-19. There were plenty of other local walking groups people could get on board with. Hugh wasn't prepared to run the walks, while BFC didn't take accountability for them.
- Design for a sign for multi-user paths has been produced by TRF in consultation with some LCAF members and BFC officers. To get approval from BFC and to also run this past BHS and South East Berks Ramblers. BFC have the right to install signs on highways, but out of courtesy would need to check with the landowners of where they're looking to install the signs.
(Action: David Warren, Jenny Yung, Colin Bird and BFC)
- Cabbage Hill Path new route – to contact Thames Water to get this moving again.
(Action: Chair)
- Bracknell Forest Local Plan and Jealott's Hill development. BFC website said there was a delay in progressing the local plan to the next round of consultation, as they were still processing consultation feedback from the last round. September – expect to have the LP ready for the pre-submission consultation, which is when LCAF should provide input to RoW. BFC to keep LCAF updated on timescales.
(Action: Graham Pockett and Rose Wicks)

153. The challenges in managing access to outdoor spaces during COVID-19

The meeting was presented with slides showing examples of how the council had been experiencing issues such as littering, fires and other forms of anti-social behaviour in our parks and open spaces, and what they'd been doing to tackle these. BFC were also sharing messages encouraging people to stay safe during the coronavirus pandemic.

154. Safe and sustainable use of parks and open spaces

Areas looked at included:

- Encouraging walking and cycling where possible – deter inappropriate parking on the highway
- Respect our parks and open spaces – don't litter or light fires (working with the royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service). Huge pressure on the number of people using parks litter bins
- Follow social distancing guidelines – keep dogs on leads.
- Protect wildlife
- Wear and tear of facilities
- Cycling
- Raising awareness of what BFC are doing i.e. #ThankYouLocalGov campaign.

David Warren signposted Rose Wicks to a book called Nudge, which has scientific examples of how to persuade the public to follow comms messages.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

Chris Swatridge gave an overview of the damage being done to a heavily used boardwalk and public FP at Wildmoor Heath. This is caused by increased use by pedestrians and cyclists when traveling at speed.

BFC were carrying out running repairs to the boardwalk to keep it safe, but a longer-term solution was needed. BFC had been investigating options to limit cycling along the boardwalk and how they might replace it where it was being most impacted by heavy use and age. The expense was proving to be a big challenge.

Site meeting to be organised between Rob Solomon, Natural England, BBOWT and contractor to discuss plans. BFC have looked at removing the boardwalk and raising the path, but there could be issues with using imported material which if not carefully managed might negatively impact the sensitive ecology of Wildmoor Heath. As the site is SSSI and SPA anything would need to be approved by Natural England.

(Action: BFC officers)

Michael Brossard flagged up increased amounts of anti-social behaviour in this area and the damage being done by mountain bikes and quadbikes, which had also been flagged up by the Sandhurst Residents Association. Michael also updated members on what he had been doing to address the issue of dog poo caused by more walking in the area. This is particularly bad at the end of Thibet Road. The supply of dog poo bags was one of his suggestions.

Rose provided an update on behalf of Phillip Burke (BFC Senior Transport Coordinator) about the increased amount of people cycling during COVID-19, which was generally welcomed, but it was highlighted that this had the potential for more conflict between people walking and cycling, when trying to maintain social distancing. There was also an issue of some people not always cycling responsibly, which BFC were trying to address via signage and comms.

In May the Government announced an Emergency Active Travel Fund of £250 million, focused on measures to support walking and cycling which local transport authorities could bid for a portion of.

For the Tranche 1 bid BFC submitted a proposal to improve the junction of Warfield Road, Sandy Lane and Holly Spring Lane to make it more cycle-friendly. This is a key junction on a main North/South corridor linking housing areas to the town centre, as well as an East/West corridor linking housing to a Primary and Secondary school. BFC are working on additional schemes to improve cycle infrastructure for when the larger Tranche 2 bidding round is announced.

Alvin said that the developments in that area should be paying towards safety improvements to the junction. Rose to follow this up with Phillip and asks that he responds to Alvin's query.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

The signage for the Bracknell Forest section of National Cycle Network route 422 – which connects Newbury to Ascot, via Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell – has now been installed. Envisaged as a predominantly leisure route, NCN 422 will also be useful for people considering cycling to work across local authority borders.

Colin flagged up how some of the cycleways, particularly next to roads, were becoming narrow because of overgrowing vegetation. London Road down from the Mercedes Garage was one of the places where this was an issue. Chris explained how COVID-19 had impacted on contracted work to maintain grass areas, by strimming. Colin said that this was a longer-term issue and asked if there were funds to help address this.

Chris would follow this up with CLL and Colin would provide feedback to Phillip Burke.

(Action: Chris Swatridge and Chair)

Colin to send Rose some potential improvements to cycleways, to be sent to Phillip.

(Action: Rose Wicks and Chair)

155. **Crown Estate Land**

The Look Out car park had re-opened on a trial basis, opening between 9am and 6pm.

Restricted capacity for visitors- 50% of its normal capacity. Additional measures in place to direct the flow of people and cyclists on the site. This includes signage and directions provided for visitors to ensure the safe movement of people around the site. The entrance is closed when car park reaches capacity. There is no opportunity for vehicles to queue on site or on the access roads, and traffic wardens will be in attendance to address illegal parking. Remains chargeable as normal and parking machines are accepting contactless card payments only.

The Look Out facilities, including the Discovery Centre, coffee shop, toilets, play areas and the other businesses based on the site will remain closed in accordance with government guidelines.

Swinley Forest - rare and valuable wildlife habitat, which is sensitive to disturbance. The use of barbecues or campfires on site is strictly forbidden and people need to take litter home with them. Broken glass bottles pose a threat to visitors and their dogs; they trap wildlife and can magnify the sun causing forest fires. Cyclists should ride within their limits and recognise that the area will be busier than normal with walking activities and family visits. Any accidents in remote areas will put pressure on the NHS and the emergency services, taking resources away from the COVID-19 response.

156. **Developments, public access and SANGs**

Pedestrian access to Wellers Lane SANG 2 was covered earlier in the meeting (under point 140).

Members were given an overview of SANG improvement works, which Rob had kindly provided photos for e.g. sculptures along The Cut Countryside Corridor, pond viewing platform at Pope's Meadow and surfaced paths.

157. Monitoring and maintaining PRow

Graham gave an overview of the signage for Ambarrow rail crossing diversion. He showed pictures of the new 3 Castles Path signs which have since been installed.

Winkfield FP19 – There had been several complaints about the obstruction to this FP, which BFC had been working to resolve. The contractor has now applied for a Temp TRO to commence of the 10 June.

Warfield FP5 – BFC continuing to address the obstruction to this FP by unauthorised gates.

Multi-user paths sign – covered earlier in the agenda.

158. Building on increased awareness and usage of PRowS and open spaces

An update on this matter had already been given by BFC officers under point 142.

In addition, Rose advised members that the Countryside Code had recently been updated and now contained advice about visiting the countryside during COVID-19.

There was also a new website where people can search for outdoor activities, including walking, cycling, family activities etc.

<https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/guides/covid-19-update>

159. Any Other Business

Alvin Finch referenced the FP that runs down to where the old Garth Hill College was, coming from Warfield Road. Some people have visited the new housing estate and can see where the line of the FP used to exist. Alison Saunders, previous employee at BFC had investigated this previously. Hugh referenced how Bracknell Development Corporation were diligent about removing FPs in the local area.

(Action: Graham Pockett)

Jenny Yung gave some positive feedback about the local green spaces she had been visiting for exercise during COVID-19 her area, particularly Englemere Pond which had undergone significant improvements, including a pond viewing platform.

Hugh fed back that future meeting structures should be more defined, and they should move through the agenda items more quickly.

To provide papers before the next meeting, so members and officers can prepare in advance.

160. Date of Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday 13 October at 6:30pm. Venue TBC.

CHAIRMAN