

Report on the SE Local Access Forum Conference

Tuesday, 21st May

A lot of the sessions were to do with cycling, one of which was promoting cycling in the Chilterns for some reason financed by Wokingham Borough Council. There is somewhere in the Henley/Twyford area where you can hire electric bicycles, we were told that they are allowed to go anywhere that a pedal cycles can go. There are plans to have a network of recharging points all over the Chilterns, see <http://www.ctc.org.uk/near-me/chilterns> at the moment but in the future they will use <http://www.cycle-chilterns.co.uk/>

There was a talk by someone from the CLA, they have produced a document http://www.cla.org.uk/Policy_Work/Policy_Reports/Access_to_the_Countryside/Rights_of_Way/1009310.htm/ which they describe as a common sense approach to access to the countryside. Our local U3A have a project on to search the historic records to find lost rights of way. Naturally the CLA are very much against this, land owners buy land in good faith, their searches show no access, then campaigners bring up these historic claims. They want the procedures for sorting it out streamlined. They also want to be able to divert or close rights of way with less bureaucracy. They are in favour of permissive paths because of the flexibility it gives.

There was a talk by the Senior Environment Advisor (Access & Recreation) of the MOD. Most of their training areas were "waste" land, now it is highly praised environmentally sensitive land, so they have to balance their training needs with conservation and recreational use. He complained of people whether on foot, horseback or in 4x4s appearing in the middle of firing ranges that are supposed to be closed off and when areas are open, people interfering with live ordnance despite warnings not to touch things. If there are accidents the MOD is blamed. Some of the training involves crawling through bushes which is not very pleasant if there is dog mess. For historic reasons there is a plethora of different byelaws, some inconsistent. They are wanting to produce a consistent set of byelaws and improve signage.

There was a talk on the virtues of smart phones. He described these QR codes as 3D bar codes and give you access to pages and pages of information. We were told that mobile web access will overtake that from home based computers next year and is 3 to 5 times faster. Something called Augmented Reality (AR) is free to download from LAYAR. All along the South Downs Way are QR codes give access to details of the route and points of interest, they have started on the North Downs Way.

We had a talk about the history of cycling in the New Forest. For some reason the Court of Verderers very anti-cyclists. In 1925 parliament gave public access to Crown Lands, which included for cyclists in the New Forest, then in 1995 there was a draconian byelaw which restricted cycling.

There was an update from Natural England. There is a delivery plan to be issued this week. There is a survey, Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), see <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/research/mene.aspx> There is European money for Paths for Communities over two years, of which we are half way through. In the SE there have been 43 enquiries, 3 applications of which one has been approved. There are 48 Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) for which there is no money, see <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/default.aspx>. These are to connect area of high conservation value to allow plants and animals to move between them, the target is Biodiversity 2020 which contains four key outcomes covering priority habitats and ecosystem services, marine, species and people that it is seeking to achieve by 2020.

Richard Mosses, May, 2013.