

LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
7 OCTOBER 2003
(7.00 pm – 8.15 pm)

Present: Diana Pidgeon (Chairman)
David Bertie
Celia Blay
Michael Dyer
Chris Gardner
Cllr Anne Haydon
Michael Hutson
Councillor Iain McCracken
Mark Osman
Peter Radband
Derek Stickler
Caroline Tomalin
Simon Weeks

Also present: Helen Tranter, Head of Countryside, Open Spaces and Heritage
James Dymond, Countryside Research Assistant
Emma Dearsley, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Fletcher, Rights of Way Officer, Windsor and Maidenhead
Anthony Hurst, Rights of Way Officer, Windsor and Maidenhead

Apologies for absence were received from:
Stuart Tarrant (Vice-chairman)
Robert Bonnie

10. Welcome

In welcoming all to the second meeting of the Chairman briefly explained the background to the establishment of the Forum and its purpose.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the Local Countryside Access Forum held on 27 March 2003, were approved as a correct record.

Members noted that Sue Cload had retired from the Forum.

12. National Countryside Access Forum (Item 4)

The Forum received details regarding the National Countryside Access Forum, which advised the Countryside Agency on the development of policy and procedures to implement access legislation. It was established in July 1999 and was a useful way of finding consensus and resolving differences between interests.

NCAF wanted to improve links with Local Access Forums and now had a web-site for people to access. The web address was www.countryside.gov.uk/reception/meetingspasaccess.asp.

13. **Access Land Update (Item 5)**

The Forum was informed that the Countryside Agency was preparing maps of all open country and registered common land in England. This was a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Countryside Agency had divided the country into eight mapping areas and a public consultation had taken place on each of the draft maps. Following the consultation, those with a legal interest in the land had a chance to appeal to the Secretary of State.

Members were presented with a provisional map of Bracknell Forest. The area of open country on the map was believed to be Barossa although it was unclear. It was suggested that officers spoke to the MOD to ask whether this area was not for public access.

14. **Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP)**

The Forum was reminded that Local Highways Authorities (LHAs) were required to prepare and publish a ROWIP for improving rights of way, in the light of the needs of the public, including disabled people.

The role of ROWIPs was to be the primary framework by which LHAs would identify the changes to be made, through management and improvement, to its local rights of way network in order to meet the Government's aim of better provision for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and people with mobility problems.

The Forum was informed that the Council had begun to look at the format and people to consult. Members were asked to contact Helen Tranter, the Head of Open Spaces, Countryside and Heritage, with any ideas or issues they would like to be included in the plans.

15. **Devil's Highway (Crowthorne RUPP 12) Traffic Regulation Order Review (Item 7)**

At its last meeting, the Forum had received a report relating to the five-year review of the above Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). The TRO had been subjected to public consultation and members received the results.

Councillor McCracken, the Executive Member for Leisure had considered the review report and the result of the public consultation. He had come to the conclusion that no action should be taken to remove or amend the existing TRP on the Devils Highway. He reminded the Forum that retaining the TRO reinforced the council's duty, under Section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of all traffic, including walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. This would conform to the original reasons for establishing the Order. Furthermore, retaining the TRO would allow the Police to maintain powers to confiscate vehicles if they were driven dangerously. The TRO did, however, exclude the possibility of access to Butter Hill, a site for organised off-road motorcycling, but it was possible that alternative access routes could be created parallel to the Devils Highway.

The Forum discussed the options available to them. In particular, the possibility of allowing a controlled access to the site by means of a permit system or by granting other private rights.

The Forum noted that the existing status of the Devil's Highway as a Road Used as a Public Path (RUPP) would change to a Restricted Byway under the new legislation being introduced as part of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The implication of this was that the public would have a right of way on foot, horseback or leading a horse and a right for vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles. The TRO prohibited motorised vehicles and so was likely to become redundant, although no action would need to be taken on the matter in the near future.

The Forum commented on the action police could take following complaints of incidences of dangerous driving. Members asked whether the powers of the police in such situations could be clarified. Peter Radband circulated a police notice that was placed by Welsh local authorities in areas where they had experienced problems. The Forum felt that this was a good way to raise awareness amongst the riders and suggested that it be investigated further.

The Forum agreed that comments and suggestions be referred to the Executive Member for Emergency Services and Community Safety, Councillor North.

16. Quiet Lanes

Helen Tranter reported on behalf of Robert Bonney, about lanes and minor roads in the Borough which had become increasingly more dangerous since drivers used them as 'rat runs'. Members noted that fatal vehicle crashes occurred more frequently on rural roads and in 2002, 60% of all fatalities had occurred on them.

The Forum discussed what could be done to raise awareness of 'quiet roads'. Robert Bonney had suggested that the Forum contact the Parish Councils with its concerns. Furthermore, the Council should identify 'quiet lane' priorities and organise a clear consultation programme for their implementation. Members agreed that it was difficult to make many changes, and their best option was to make speeding restrictions along certain roads, such as Brazier lane.

It was agreed that members would email James Dymond, the Countryside Research Assistant, with roads they felt required speed restrictions. These would be forwarded to the Highways Department and a report brought back to the next meeting.

17. Bridleways and Equestrian routes

Caroline Tomalin reported to the Forum about suitable bridleways in the Borough and possible schemes to use private land for riding.

There had been discussion about linking routes together, in particular, Priory lane to Watersplash Lane. Members suggested that these proposals should be forwarded to Helen Tranter suggested for the Improvement Plans. Another area highlighted was Newell Green and it was agreed that officers would check that adequate signage was in the area indicating a bridleway.

The Forum discussed using private land for riding on a 'pay as you use' basis. However, farmers disliked the idea as there was no insurance for the riders and would cost money to set aside land and 'police' the scheme. A scheme was run for horse riders at the Look Out but the Crown Estate carried its own liability insurance.

18. Items for Next Meeting Agenda

The following matters were identified for inclusion on the agenda in respect of the Forum's next meeting:

- Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Access Land Update – Feedback from MOD
- Devil's Highway (Crowthorne RUPP 12) – Feedback
- Quiet Lanes – Feedback from Highways Department
- Presentation on Borough Transport Plan; and
- Training / development programmes.

19. Any Other Business

Membership

Members were informed that officers had continued to seek a person with a disability to become a co-opted member of the Forum.

Blackwater Valley Footpath

Simon Weeks reported that he had been approached by users of the Blackwater footpath who were concerned that the footpath, which was not supposed to be used as a bridleway, was still being used as such. It was causing particular problems for people in wheelchairs. The Head of Countryside, Open Spaces and Heritage noted the report and would look into the issue.

20. Date of Next Meeting

The Forum was informed that the next meeting would be held in March 2004. The date and time of the next meeting would be circulated to members shortly.