

LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
01 APRIL 2008
(7.00 pm – 9.00 pm)

Present: **Statutory Board Members:**
Mrs Diana Pidgeon (Chairman)
Mrs Celia Blay
Councillor Michael Brossard
Mr Joe Dodson
Mr Mike Gates
Sharon Holt
Mr Richard Mosses
Mr Peter Radband
Councillor Raymond Simonds

In attendance:
Ben Allison, Democratic Services Officer
Sally Coulson, Projects Officer (Parks and Countryside)
James Dymond, Development Officer (Parks and Countryside)
Richard Walton, Parks and Countryside Manager

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr David Bertie
Mr Derick Stickler
Mr Derick Stickler
Mr Stuart Tarrant

11. Welcome - DP

Diana Pidgeon welcomed all members to the meeting and introduced Sharon Holt as the new horse-riding interest representative, and Ben Allison – the Democratic Services Officer who would be taking the minutes at the meeting.

12. Apologies

Derick Stickler, Stuart Tarrant, and David Bertie gave their Apologies for Absence

13. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising - DP

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 25 September 2007 were approved as a correct record.

Matters Arising

Minute 8.5

Richard Walton informed the forum that the borough was clear of Foot and Mouth Disease, although it was noted that Runnymede Meadows was still closed as per the precaution to close all infected sites for one year after the infection.

14. **Membership**

Sally Coulson informed the forum that the Member Interest List had been revised and sent out. It was noted that Sharon Holt had become the new horse-riding interest representative, but that the forum was still trying to recruit a disabled interest representative and further landowner interest representatives. Sally Coulson reported that she had already contacted Mike Broughton, Chairman of the Disabled Rambler's Society – but explained that he had not yet replied.

15. **Site Visits**

Shepherd Meadows Walk

James Dymond informed the forum that an informal walk around Shepherd Meadows had been planned to discuss the works proposed for the site's role as a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Green space) under Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) mitigation works. The walk would start at 10 am on Friday 4 April. Anybody with an interest in the future of this site was encouraged to attend.

Bluebells Walk

Mike Gates reported on the bluebells walk that had been planned in Warfield. The one hour walk would start at 2 o'clock and end at 3 o'clock on Sunday 13 April, beginning at Hawthorne Lane near its junction with Nuptown Lane. The postcode for those who wanted to use a Sat Nav device to locate the beginning of the walk was RG42 6HX. Tea and Scones would be available after the walk at Mike Gates' house. Sally Coulson would email these details to all forum members after the meeting.

(ACTION – Sally Coulson)

16. **Thames Basin Heaths SPA**

SANGs Update

James Dymond reported that work on SANGs locations designed to draw the public away from the Thames Basin Heaths SPA was ongoing. Specifically, the mini-plans for SANGs sites at Horseshoe Lake, Englemere Pond and the Lily Hill Park cluster were finalised. In other areas like Larks Hill, Garth Meadows and the neighbouring copses and Shepherd Meadows, mini-plans were still undergoing development but should be ready by the end of April.

Access Management Update

Access Management Partnership:

Richard Walton reported that Natural England was initiating a new partnership – the Access Management Partnership – to organize work across the SPA. The main focus of the Access Management Partnership was reported to be increasing the co-ordination between Ranger services, but the second strand within the partnership was to secure funding for this co-ordinated work. Moreover the Access Management Partnership would itself be part of the Joint Strategic Partnership, a body with a focus on planning which would operate at senior Member level. Therefore the Access Management Partnership would be able to relay high level planning strategies back to the Local Countryside Access Forum and also hopefully relay some of the concerns of the forum back to the Joint Strategic Partnership.

17. **Regional LAF Work**

Letter from Minister Jonathan Shaw

This letter was noted by the forum.

National Forum Update

Sally Coulson reported that Natural England had confirmed their support for an English National Access Forum (ENAF). It was anticipated that a further national meeting would be held on 15 May to agree the details of how ENAF would operate.

There have been suggestions that, before 15 May, a meeting of regional representatives would be necessary in order to agree who the South East delegates should be and what views they should be putting forward at the national meeting. There was some discussion as to whether representatives at the regional meeting should be LAF Chairs.

Sally explained that she could not report on the level of support that Natural England would be able to offer future 'regional meetings', since this had not been confirmed.

18. **Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

Winkfield Bridleway Creation Update

Sally Coulson reported that much research had gone into clarifying who the landowners in possession of the relevant land were. She confirmed that she had been able to create a contact list and would begin the process of to contact each landowner to inform them about the work for a 'dead-end' bridleway, before further action could be taken.

Definitive Map Review

James Dymond reported that work on the Definitive Map review was ongoing; the procedure of updating the map was complex since every detail had to be checked over and confirmed and every legal change since the last edition (January 2000), had to be added. He explained that work was currently two thirds complete and that what remained to be done was ensuring the legal accuracies were followed, before the new edition could be published.

Warfield byway and bridleway improvements

It was noted that further improvement works had taken place to Public Rights of Way in the Warfield area, such as repairs to Pendry's Lane.

Sandhurst footpaths resurfacing

It was reported that Sandhurst Footpath 2, (stretching from Sandhurst High Street to Swan Lane) had been opened up and resurfaced with tarmac. Additionally Sandhurst Footpath 4, (stretching between Perry Hill Drive and Scotland Hill in Sandhurst), had also been resurfaced with tarmac.

It was enquired whether the new Sandhurst rights of way had been added to the Definitive Map. James Dymond explained that this was not necessary since the paths were already registered as Public Footpaths.

19. Greenspace Strategy (RW)

Richard Walton updated the forum on the new 'Green Spaces strategy' which was soon to go out for consultation – details of which were circulated in the agenda.

The strategy had four main topics:

- **Children and Young People:**
This theme focuses on trying to find appropriate areas for this group to enjoy the outdoors.
- **Children's play:**
This theme focuses on reversing the risk averse attitude of children today.
- **Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage:**
This theme focuses on improving and preserving these factors and the role green space has in adapting to climate change
- **New Development:**
With the increasing need for housing in the South East over the next two to three decades, it would be imperative that the Green Spaces Strategy be formulated to incorporate the high housing targets of the borough. As a result this theme would focus on increasing collaboration between the council and developers to try and improve the appearance and effectiveness of green spaces. This was particularly true of 'back land sites' – areas where scrap land had become designated green space, and subsequently become areas which attracted vandalism and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

A member of the forum inquired what the Green Spaces Strategy would offer elderly people. Richard Walton explained that part of the action plan was to try and ensure that infrastructure of the strategy served the whole population. This would include the provision of good entrances to sites, improved surfaces, drainage, adequate seating and shelter with clear signage to refreshment and toilet facilities.

Another member asked what disabled facilities would be included. James Dymond explained that access for all was encouraged wherever possible on new green spaces, while also maintaining the often rural feel of these.

Bearing in mind recent legal problems with the use of non porous materials – i.e. tarmac in domestic settings, one member of the forum asked whether the council was using any alternative materials were being used for resurfacing. James Dymond explained that outside urban areas the council tried to use more natural, porous material like hoggin. In transitional sites where urban landscape bordered on green space, the council attempted to use other surface materials – like resin covered gravel for example, which is less porous than hoggin but involves a slower run off of water.

On a separate issue Richard explained that existing green space areas were being assessed against the Green Flag Award standards – the highest profile award for green spaces in the country. In fact, three of the four Green Flag sites in Berkshire are located in the borough of Bracknell. To put this in context, this meant that the quality of these sites was on a par with that found in the Royal Parks. Bracknell Forest Borough Council was seeking to bring more sites up to this standard, and Lily Hill Park had been entered for the award this year, with plans to enter South Hill Park at some time in the future.

However, there were some views that the Green Flag system tended to celebrate good sites at the expense of underachieving sites. To combat this, a new standard called the Plus One Principle was coming into force. This would involve setting up a baseline standard to which currently underperforming green spaces could be brought.

20. **Interpretation & Marketing**

Leaflet Review

Sally Coulson reported that unfortunately the leaflet proofs were not yet ready for viewing, but that she would email these to members of the forum for them to return their comments. The approach to these leaflets would be more co-ordinated, with the team looking at using the strapline "Discover..." on these leaflets.

Wildmoor Heath Signage

The budget allocation for Interpretation and Signage was reported to be £20,000 which included the Natural England Access Management Grant of £2,250. Sally explained that as part of the Wildmoor Heath signage strategy, Bracknell Forest Borough Council had rationalized site access points by focussing on legal access points and those to neighbouring settlements and by closing off ad-hoc entrances.

It was explained that a 2-tier approach to signage had been adopted with the intention of increasing site awareness by providing key messages at strategic points. These two approaches depended on the type of entrance. For a High-use entrance, a large entrance name sign with a combined information/interpretation board would be used, while for a low-use entrance a small entrance name sign with a single (free standing) information board would be used. There would be 10 entrance signs in total: 5 large signs and 5 small signs, along with 4 interpretation/ information boards and 5 separate information boards.

The issue of motorbikes was raised - specifically how motorbikes could be discouraged from entering Wildmoor Heath whilst simultaneously allowing wheelchair users to visit. It was noted that in fact the use of barriers might actually encourage motorbikes since they may view these obstacles as a challenge.

A member of the forum enquired whether the boardwalk was to be replaced. This was confirmed. It was commented that the fencing around the site was also to be revised, with less fencing within the heath itself, but better quality fences around the perimeter of the site. The council was looking at the line of the current boundary fencing since this needed to be repaired in places. It was reported that much clearing and resurfacing work needed to be done on the northern side of the site, which had a considerable garden dumping problem. Here the council was partnering up with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust to advertise the fact that clearing work was going on.

21. **Any other business**

Rights of way closures due to pylon works

James Dymond informed the forum of imminent Public Rights of Way closures – the details of which were circulated in the agenda. A member of the forum enquired whether work on the pylons would be carried out during the bird nesting season – since this could be extremely disruptive. Richard Walton reported that in fact Bracknell Forest Council imposed more conditions and restrictions on companies looking to conduct work in these areas than Natural England itself. However, ultimately it was Natural England's mandate to approve Balfour BT's plans - which

Natural England felt adequately took into account all factors. Furthermore, James Dymond highlighted the fact that much of the most disruptive work had been carried out before the nesting season began. The only work which might be carried out would be the replacement of the power lines themselves.

Performance Indicator BVPI 178

Hugh Fitzwilliams and James Dymond advised the forum about the Best Value Performance Indicator 178 – a national standard for rights of way. It involved testing 15% of randomly selected paths within the borough (although 20% was measured in Bracknell) on issues like signage, styles, surfacing, bridges and the general standard of the path. It was commented that this indicator had been useful for gauging and maintaining the standard of the borough's rights of way. Richard Walton reported that over recent years, Bracknell had only once not received 100% in this test. However, the government was reported to have issued a new set of national indicators – from which the BVPI was scrapped. The forum was asked whether they would approve keeping the BVPI as a regional indicator – since this would be supported by the government. The forum approved this suggestion.

Love Parks Week

The forum was informed about 'Love Parks' week – as detailed in the agenda. Diana Pigeon informed the forum that on Saturday 5 July and Sunday 6 July, events involving Salsa dancing and a concert by the 'Alternative 3 Tenors' would be taking place.

Annual Report

Sally Coulson reported that the annual reports had been completed and would soon be circulated and placed on the LCAF website. She sent a copy round the meeting and asked any members who had any comments to make to forward them to her – after which the report would be finalised and sent out.

(ACTION – Sally Coulson)

Natural England – Discovering Lost Ways

It was reported that Natural England had announced that it would be aborting this project to rediscover ancient British paths due to the costs involved. Instead it would focus on current rights of way legislation. However, James Dymond pointed out that if any members of the forum were interested in pursuing a similar project at a local level – National England had confirmed that such projects might be supported. It was requested that any ideas on this matter be forwarded to James.

(ACTION – ALL)

Local Access Forum Handbook

Sally Coulson reported that the Natural England Local Access Forum Members Handbook had progressed; it was anticipated that it would be available online in May 2008 and hard copies would also become available subsequently. These would be circulated.

(ACTION – Sally Coulson)

Robin Mosses

Richard Mosses reported that his brother Robin, a long-term rights of way walker and campaigner in the borough was currently recuperating in the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The forum extended their best wishes to Robin at this trying time.

Contact Details

Diana Pidgeon asked the forum whether it would approve of the members contact details being circulated around the forum – since this was useful in easing communication between members. The forum agreed this suggestion and Sally Coulson reported that a list was available to be circulated and that this would also provide an opportunity for members to review their contact details.

(ACTION – Sally Coulson)

22. **Date of Next Meeting**

Diana Pidgeon asked the forum what the best dates for the next meeting might be. Two dates were proposed - Tuesday 30 September or Thursday 2 October. It was reported that Sally Coulson would circulate these dates to the membership of the forum via email – and the most popular date would be selected for the meeting.

(ACTION – Sally Coulson)

CHAIRMAN