

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
12 OCTOBER 2021
7.00 - 9.00 PM**



Present:

Members:

Colin Bird (Chairman)
Richard Mosses (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Michael Brossard
Richard Elsbury
Councillor Alvin Finch
Hugh Fitzwilliams
Sue McDaid
Geoff Paxton

In attendance:

Graham Pockett, Parks & Countryside Development Manager
Robert Solomon, Ranger (Countryside and PROW)
Rose Wicks, Parks & Countryside Project Officer

Observers:

Nicholas Ballard
Heather Brown

Apologies for absence were received from:

David Warren
Jenny Yung

193. Welcome

The chair welcomed the forum to the meeting. The chair also welcomed Heather Brown and Nicholas Ballard who have been working with the Ramblers Association on the lost paths project which aims to get lost paths on the maps by 2026.

194. Apologies

Colin Bird highlighted that Simon Yates and Sylvia Thomas have been assumed to have stepped down as they have not been in touch with the forum for some time. Simon was a keen cyclist which meant that the Forum was missing some cycling expertise. However, Sue McDaid shared that she is a cyclist. Colin Bird was planning a recruitment drive, particularly to fill the gap of countryside users who experience accessibility issues. Rose Wicks added that she had a members' interests list from when members joined the forum and she proposed to circulate that with consent so that any missing details could be added. The forum agreed for this to be distributed amongst the members.

Action: Rose Wicks to distribute the members' interests list to members of the forum.

195. **Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

Arising from minute 188 (Wildmoor Heath Boardwalk), Richard Mosses expressed that the improvement works to the Boardwalk had been done very well.

Colin Bird highlighted that there were four actions from the previous meeting which were to be discussed in further agenda items.

196. **ROWIP2 Actions – PRoW Improvements**

Colin Bird reported on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP2) and assured the forum that LCAF's proposals for new / modified PRoWs and access routes would be attached to these minutes (appendix 1). Colin Bird suggested setting up a subgroup to check feasibility of each of these proposals. This would help to determine which actions needed to be prioritised. Hugh Fitzwilliams and Richard Mosses volunteered to join the subgroup and asked Graham Pockett to be part of that, which Graham agreed.

Action: Colin Bird to arrange a meeting of the subgroup within the next month.

New footpath link, Sandhurst FP27

LCAF had supported the idea of turning the remaining part of the Three Castles Path at Ambarrow to a public footpath. Graham Pockett updated that the modification order had gone through without any objections, although was still within the six-week legal objection period. If approved, it would appear on the next version of the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps. The final piece of work to do on this project was to add the standard green public footpath sign on the entrance to the car park.

New footpath, Sandhurst FP26

Graham Pockett updated that the order had been approved with no objections and the footpath has been added to the GIS mapping tool.

Hawthorndale Lane, Warfield BR25

Rob Solomon reported that there had been some excavation and repair works at Hawthorndale Lane which was undertaken to reduce flooding.

The Northern Greenway

Rose Wicks presented to the forum information which had been put together for a new accessible circular route around Jock's Park, Cabbage Hill and Garth Meadow. The route, which had been suggested by Hugh Fitzwilliams, had also been walked by Jenny Yung, David Warren and Colin Bird to check its accessibility. Instructions were then used to provide a map of the route (GIS) and directions suitable for the public to follow. These still needed to be checked.

The suggestion was that the route would be made available on the Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) website once the redevelopment work had been completed. Rose Wicks suggested that the information could potentially be pulled together in leaflet form and expected that, once that was done, the website would be ready. The Forum felt that "The Northern Greenway" name temporarily given to the route was misleading and suggested calling it "The Cabbage Hill and Garth Circuit". Graham Pockett suggested calling it "The Cabbage Hill and The Cut Circuit".

Rose Wicks requested suggestions for other accessible routes within the Borough. Councillor Brossard expressed that he would like to explore what could be done

along Shepherd Meadows and the Blackwater River. Colin Bird added that he wanted to ensure that dropped kerbs were always opposite each other for accessibility purposes.

Mapping TROs

Rose Wicks updated the forum on the process of mapping Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) and shared an example. The Highways team have mapped all the TROs on roads and Rose Wicks was in the process of putting equivalent information for public rights of way on the GIS platform, with the aim to make the information available to the public. The routes needed to be checked to ensure they were correct and, once updated, would be shared with LCAF. Behind the maps would be a data set with specifics of when the TRO came into force and information about accessibility, etc.

Action: Colin Bird asked for the link to the online, interactive rights of way maps to be included in these minutes, as this was a useful tool for LCAF members to have:

[Public Rights of Way \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

Wildmoor Heath boardwalk, Sandhurst FP24

Rob Solomon updated that BFC and the landowner joint-funded a new boardwalk as it regularly needed repairing. The footpath improvements included new sections of raised gravel path which was significantly better for maintenance and was hoped to increase longevity. However, it couldn't be completely replaced by a raised path due to the ecological impact on the site, so there were still some sections of boardwalk. Colin Bird asked whether it was wide enough for a buggy. Rob Solomon confirmed that it was. Councillor Brossard commented that the transformation has positively enhanced the local facility.

197. **Winkfield FPs 13 and 19**

Graham Pockett updated that he has chased up the contractors' planning director twice regarding putting in an application for a permanent diversion from the polo pitches but has not heard back. The second extension to the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) from the Secretary of State was due to expire on 9 December. If the Secretary of State did not agree a further extension (if requested), the footpath would revert to its original line. The hope was that the path diversion would be made permanent. Alternatively, an application could be made for permissive paths. However, the contractors have not come back on either suggestion. BFC could make the application on its own but would then lose out on the fee for it, which ought to come from the landowner.

Action: Geoff Paxton to follow-up with Winkfield Parish Council and report back whether they would be willing to liaise with the landowner / contractor.

198. **Annual Report**

Rose Wicks explained that there was a duty under the Wildlife Countryside Act for Local Access Forums to produce an annual report. We used to have to submit a copy each year to Natural England which was quite a dry report, but as a forum we also produced our own report which was more of a public interest document and was published on the BFC website. The team was in the process of drafting a combined 2020 and 2021 report to take into account a slower two years in the delivery of actions due to the impact caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, Rose Wicks highlighted that a lot had still been done to improve Rights of Way despite all of the big challenges faced and would like to include this detail in the report. Given the pivotal role of the forum, Rose Wicks expressed that she would like for the report to include a foreword by the Chair (Colin Bird agreed he would be willing to do that).

Once completed, the report would be circulated to the forum for feedback. The aim was to complete the report by the end of the year with a view to publish at the beginning of 2022. The published report would be promoted via the Parks & Countryside newsletter which would also highlight some of the work carried out to improve public access to open spaces and rights of way.

Members of the forum highlighted certain issues with the photo which had been included in the presentation to depict the draft front cover of the annual report. Rose Wicks explained that this picture, which was from ROWIP2, was simply used as an example of how the cover might look. A better picture would feature members of the Forum doing site visits, which the forum agreed to.

Hugh Fitzwilliams suggested, instead of saying “to take into account slow two years on delivery of actions...”, to re-word so it says, “to take into account the effect of Covid-19 which has interrupted the delivery process”. Hugh Fitzwilliams also requested that the report stresses the increased usage of paths and open spaces during the pandemic which naturally created additional work. Rose Wicks assured Hugh that his comments would be taken on board, and that the text in the presentation was only for the purposes of presenting the information to members.

199. **Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces**

Windmill Meadows

Graham Pockett updated that Windmill Meadows has opened to the public. It is a third party Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) but will be transferred to the Council. Members commented that no one appears to have been emptying the bins. It is a good open space with 12 to 13 hectares of land. It has a footpath along the southern edge, for about two thirds of the length of the site. Graham Pockett advised that there were two openings into the footpath network from the SANG. The farm next to the SANG was up for sale and there were planning applications in place.

Piglittle Fields

Graham Pockett advised that this was a SANG provided by Bellway. The land transfer was in process and expected to be completed within the next few months. Progress was delayed due to lack of suitable vehicular access, so BFC negotiated an extra piece of land to allow maintenance access. Colin Bird expressed that the quality of the paths was not good. Graham Pockett explained that it was not getting as much heavy use; however, Sue McDaid felt that improving the quality of the path would create more usage. Graham Pockett added that one advantage of the site was that the soil was quite sandy so wouldn't get as muddy as Frost Folly.

Frost Folly

Graham Pockett updated that BFC had already been managing Frost Folly under agreement, but it has now formally transferred to BFC's freehold. Colin Bird updated that the action from the last meeting to arrange for signage to be installed explaining why the adjacent site to the south wasn't available had been completed.

Church Lane

The developer had set a precedent of not putting paths in to new SANG sites, which greatly decreased the accessibility of the sites, especially in winter. The Council's Planning team and Parks & Countryside have negotiated with them about the need for a decent path network at SANG sites and they have recently capitulated for Church Lane.

The Cut Countryside Corridor SANG

Rob Solomon shared that the SANG ran from Priory Fields, Larks Hill, towards Jocks Copse and alongside the river valley. New lecterns have been installed providing details about the SANGS. This SANG spanned 7 to 7.5 km, but the Bullbrook Countryside Corridor was around 8 km and if they were linked this could cover a large area. The forum commented that there was a missing link in the East-West Greenway within the Warfield development, but it was explained that the Greenway was instead provided within the public open spaces at Larks Hill and Priory Field.

200. **Warfield FPs 5 and 6**

Graham Pockett presented to the forum an aerial photo of Brockhill Stables and the Windmill Meadows SANG. The picture mapped a possible permissive footpath linking FP6 to FP5 and a possible realignment of FP6 to the north side of the driveway (it was currently on the south side). FP6 currently ran along the northern edge of the SANG to Brockhill Stables and the landowner had experienced several incidences of trespassing. The owners were keen to move the path to the northern side of the drive which could then be hedged or fenced to reduce people wandering around. Graham Pockett did not think that this would be a big issue legally to make that move. Colin Bird added that he believed the previous owners had moved it. Graham Pockett advised that the footpath would have to be closed while works were underway to demolish existing stables and construct new ones for safety reasons. This is why it has also been suggested to create a permissive footpath along the track that linked FP6 to FP5. However, there was a complication of an old Section 106 agreement defining a private horseway parallel to FP5. Also, the landowner at Brockhill Farm cottages would end up having more pedestrians accessing the path adjacent to their property, so a diplomatic conversation would be needed. Colin Bird added that the landowner was entitled to create a permissive path on their land and there was not a formal process in terms of objections. Members would be concerned if FP6 were closed without having a permissive path there.

Action: Graham Pockett to feedback to the landowner that the forum approved the realignment of FP6 to the north side of the drive, with a caveat that the forum expected a permissive path to be introduced whilst FP6 was closed.

201. **PRoW and Local Developments**

Crowthorne FP6 Cricketfield Grove

There was an action from the last meeting to look at whether there were any legal issues around accessibility in relation to the new steps. The developer took it upon themselves without any consultation to introduce a zigzag path with steps which was not accessible for certain users such as those who are self-propelled wheelchair users. Graham Pockett shared that there had been complaints made to the Council regarding the steps which replaced the ramped footpath. Whilst the original ramped footpath may not have conformed with official standards, members of the public had been happily using it.

The BFC response to the complaint was that the Local Authority was not legally obliged to make every footpath fully accessible and they would not be taking any further action on the matter. Rose Wicks added that the letter said that it was in fact an improvement on access to what was provided before. This would make any further challenge on the matter very difficult to justify.

Graham and Rose have sought further advice and have had a long written response from their legal team, so they need to go through the particulars of that. Adding in a ramp would not be appropriate as it would be a very steep angle. Therefore, the only solution appears to be to add signage advising of the steps and suggesting

alternative accessible routes. The forum agreed that this was the only course of action.

Action: to investigate alternative routes and what may need to be done to highlight them to users.

202. **Any Other Business**

Regarding the action from the last meeting to follow up with Thames Water around the proposed path between Cabbage Hill and Hazelwood Lane, Colin Bird updated that he had asked for a progress report but just received a response that the officer was on leave. Colin Bird also sent a reminder last week but has not heard back. The forum felt that the path would be a useful addition and there was no other use for the land, so suggested to keep chasing.

Action: Colin Bird to continue to chase up Thames Water for a response.

Rob Solomon advised that he had been liaising with a colleague from BFC who works with the Business Improvement District (BID). The BID has some funding for improvements and BFC was looking at some surface and signing improvements to the southern end of Bracknell 26 and at Bracknell 6A at Longshot Lane. BFC have had approval in terms of cost. The path was due to be installed as Cotswold gravel path and it was also expected that there would be some vegetation clearance. The improvements were expected to start before the end of the year. Graham Pockett added that they have produced a leaflet detailing a circular route for the businesspeople who use the site, and incorporated directional footpath signs in new fingerposts.

Geoff Paxton shared that the barbed wire fence at Sandy Lane in North Ascot was broken and there have been issues of dogs and children running into it as it is concealed. The forum discussed where barbed wire was permitted along rights of way. Where barbed wire was needed, such as stock-proofing, the recommendation is to place it on the field-facing side of the fence, away from the public using the right of way. In this instance the barbed wire wasn't along the line of the restricted byway, which meant that there's little BFC could do under the Highways Act to challenge its use. Colin Bird asked whether there were grounds for a statement of public hazard or whether it was technically trespassing as it was not a public access.

Action: Graham Pockett to read the relevant section in The Highways Act and report back if that is of any use.

203. **Public Question Time**

Nicholas Ballard had submitted a comment in advance regarding a path in Sandhurst marked on an old map. One path ran from Ambarrow Farm SW to Perry's Farm. The other was from Perry's Farm under the pylon all the way down along a field drain / small stream to Horseshoe Lake. Nicholas Ballard highlighted that there was a planning application for development of that area which had been turned down once but was being appealed. If the planning application progressed, it may be worth following up to see if a route could be put through there. Colin Bird felt that it was a relevant question for the forum to consider and agreed in the intervening period between meetings to liaise with Nicholas Ballard to find out more and bring this back to the meeting in February to get more views from the forum.

Action: Colin Bird to liaise with Nicholas Ballard before the next meeting.

204. **Date of Next Meeting - 1 February 2022**

The date of the next meeting would be 1 February 2022 at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed.

Members of the forum supported returning to face-to-face meetings with the possibility of holding the meeting online if circumstances changed or utilising the mechanism for hybrid meetings whereby some could attend in person and some could link electronically. The Chief Executive was due to make a decision as to whether meetings can be held at Time Square.

CHAIRMAN