

**Local COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
6 FEBRUARY 2024
7.00 - 9.15 PM**



Present:

Members:

Colin Bird (Chair)
Nicholas Ballard
Councillor Michael Brossard, Sandhurst Town Council
Councillor Sheila Collings
Denis Crampton
Richard Elsbury
Hugh Fitzwilliams
Sharon Fletcher
Les Langley
Sue McDaid

Councillor Cherise Welch (Virtually)
Jenny Yung (Virtually)

In attendance:

Stephen Chown, Head of Parks and Countryside
Robert Solomon, SANG and Rights of Way Officer
Rose Wicks, Data & Communications Officer
Richard Everett, The Crown Estate

Apologies for absence were received from:

Geoff Paxton

1. Welcome/Apologies

The Chair extended a warm welcome to all attendees, both in the chamber and online virtually.

The meeting logistics and housekeeping were discussed. Fire alarm procedures were addressed, with attendees advised to follow exit signs in case of a fire alarm.

2. Changes to Membership

The Chairman advised that, as like the previous meeting, they would continue to operate hybrid meetings. Membership had not changed since they had last met and he was still looking for a Vice Chairman to support him when or if required.

Attendees were thanked for completing the Members Interest Forms. This was not a decision-making forum but an advisory one and it was important to be transparent to memberships of other organisations. All Attendees agreed that their information could be shared online.

(Action: Rose to update the website with Members Interests)

3. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The meeting began with a discussion of the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting which took place on 10 October 2023. The Chair opened the floor for comments or corrections on the minutes.

The Chair moved on to discuss matters arising from the previous meeting: The Chair mentioned that the action points from the last meeting had been summarised and circulated.

Attendees confirmed the minutes of the last meeting and turned to Appendix 1 on an update to the actions.

Rose advised that officers did forward the matter regarding the illegal closure of West End Lane and Warfield to the Highways and Planning team for them to follow up.

Furthermore, officers provided clarification regarding the Watersplash Lane connection, which was referenced in the June 2023 meeting. This was about integrating horse access into the Warfield Strategic development proposals. Looking at the potential for creating a recreational route between Watersplash Lane and Maize Lane. This would pass through several green spaces (Lark's Hill and Priory Field) and connect with Hedge Lane bridleway.

This was still in development and officers come to that later on as it was not merely crossing Priory field, which was the big issue and whether there was or there wasn't a bridleway through Larks Hill.

A forum member raised the point that creating such a route would encourage more horses into an area which was increasingly becoming more urbanised. This could create a conflict between users of the route, which could include horse riders, dog walkers and cyclists. They weren't against maintaining existing new routes, just creating new ones. They also raised the point that stables may die out in Warfield because there were not the facilities for them any longer.

Rob advised that they do get a few enquiries from residents regarding horse riders in the more urban areas and not on bridleways. Providing an alternative, and attractive route for horse riders may help to focus horse riding in designated areas.

Another member added that they received a lot of communication from horse riders, who were very concerned about losing those routes. If the Council could provide them with an alternative formal route that they were allowed to use, that would satisfy them.

Stephen raised the point that whilst it was good to have this debate, the matter regarding the Warfield Strategic development proposals was a planning issue that was better dealt with via the planning process. There was no immediate action for the Forum to take away from this discussion. It was noted that funding through the Section 106 scheme to do the Pegasus crossings and do the works that may be required to improve the connectivity in that area was being received. The Chair highlighted how the Forum would like to be involved with the planning process, where matters relate to public access and rights of way.

The Forum could contribute to what was the user's perspective of proposed plans, as part of the planning process.

(Action: BFC to keep LCAF informed about planning applications, where rights of way were involved)

In relation to the Blackwater Valley footbridge, Stephen advised that the budget setting cycle was currently coming to its conclusion. Money had been set aside to complete and they were also seeking support from neighbouring authorities. The Borough Council had put sufficient provision in its own budget to replace the bridge. Work was underway with the Rangers investigating what the requirements would be for doing the scheme. This is anticipated to be a challenging project with the relevant permits required while working over water. There's also the need to protect the sensitive wildlife in the Blackwater Valley, which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The Chairman advised that he would be seeking thoughts for a site visit location, ideally on a Saturday.

(Action: Chair)

4. **Update from The Crown Estate**

The Chairman introduced Richard Everett, Chief Forester of The Crown Estate, to the meeting. There would be a representative in attendance at these meetings to provide an update.

The following updates were received:

- Unauthorised use of electric motorbikes continued to be a significant issue in the forest. However, it had been quieter of late due to the weather. There appeared to be around 5 or 6 regulars which The Crown Estate were aware of and roughly where they were coming from.

The Crown Estate were working in partnership with Thames Valley Police to tackle this issue. There had been two patrols undertaken by the Police, following familiarisation visits with the wardens. This was a positive step towards removal of unauthorised users and improving the site for use by other users.

- The Ramblers route signs were due to go in fairly soon. This would be alongside the resigning of the cycle trail network, which was being updated. There would be new interpretation boards and mapping which would mainly cater for the cycle trail infrastructure, but also had a wider forest mapping element for a number of different users.
- A sharing the space event was taking place at Windsor Great Park on the 6th of April, 10am-2pm just inside Black Nest Gate at Windsor Great Park on the grass area. So far there was the British Horse Society, Battersea Dogs Trust, Windsor Cycle Hub and the Thames Basin Heaths Rangers coming along to talk to the public. The aim of the event is to educate different park users and user groups about how to behave around horses, how to manage dogs, how cyclists should behave, all those sorts of things.
- They were working on project in the park to improve communications with dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership. There would be a designated space on the website which would be ready in the coming few

weeks. They would also be some information commercial dog walking on the estate.

- They were also working quite closely with the Thames Basin Heaths wardens who had supplied some of their leaflets and publications, which highlighted behaviours of visitors in heathland areas. For example, the importance of staying on paths during the ground nesting bird season.

Rob advised that the Council had a leaflet on SANGs/Public Open Space which would provide for the event. Richard explained that they already had access to this leaflet.

A forum member gave their thanks for the signs at Swinley Forest, as it would be safer for people who didn't know what way to go, what were the cycle paths, what were footpaths etc.

A question was raised regarding the car park just off Swinley Rd. It had an area set aside for horse riders to aid in moving the horse riders from Swinley Forest to Swinley Park. Attendees were advised that it was not used a lot because of the need for horse boxes to get there.

The point was raised regarding users no longer being able to easily walk through Blaines Farm. It was fenced off and the path around the side was a little obscure and muddy. It used to be a straight forward path to walk through the centre of Blaines Farm. It was queried if there was anything that could be done to improve this circular walk. Richard advised that they could look into some improved drainage and some better directions on it.

(Action: Richard)

Attendees agreed how the land was a great asset to Bracknell Forest. The Team was thanked for all the work that they did as it was really appreciated by users.

5. **Access for all**

Les and Sharon provided the Forum with a fantastic account of their site visits to Peacock Meadows and Horseshoe Lake. The focus of the visits was to enjoy these pleasant greenspaces and test the accessibility of the recreational facilities, such as gates and paths. For the large part, both sites were considered accessible, with lots of excellent facilities. There were a few issues encountered, which are included in the brief summaries below.

Thanks were expressed from the Chairman on behalf of all attendees for their accounts and very detailed and well written accounts of these,

The previous presentations as well as these would be provided to the site rangers to include in the annual report.

The feedback about accessibility could also be provided on the council's website, to help residents plan site visits.

(Action: Les / Sharon and BFC)

Rob advised that a similar report about the camber of the Horseshoe Lake path had been received from another wheelchair user, and with both reports, was building a

specification of improvements subject to funding. Both lots of feedback would also be provided to the site rangers.

(Action: Les / Sharon and BFC)

A brief summary of the visits is noted below:

- Peacock Meadows

Sharon and Les visited mid-January and the parking for disabled users was good with plenty of space for wheelchair access. The signage was also good and clear and the bollards at the entrance to the footpath added security. There was a rustic sculpture at the start of the walk which was in keeping with the natural surroundings.

They used the Great Places for circular walks leaflet which contained interesting information and was easy to use and navigate with.

The pathway was in good condition and met the needs of wheelchair users in terms of width. There were some grass pathways, but these were of suitable length and Les felt safe and secure. Albeit not far from town, it did feel like very natural countryside with some great views. On the Ramblers Route there was a swing gate not suitable for wheelchair users but the circular route avoided this. Signs were kept in keeping and informative for users. Finishing off a delightful walk was the Peacock Farm pub/restaurant which was also accessible.

- Horseshoe Lake

There were a few more accessibility issues to note on this site. Disabled parking was not available in the open space car park. However, they had found more than adequate space for disabled visitors in the nearby Activity Centre car park.

The footpath from the car park to the Activity Centre was accessible but rather narrow. Before starting they went to the café which had more than adequate accessible toilets. Access to the café was via a small, raised step. Les and Sharon didn't enter the café but did enjoy some of the refreshments on offer.

The wooden gated area, cycle gates were accessible for wheelchair users. However, it was muddy and the camber on the straight pathway uneven and made it feel unstable. Due to this and the condition of the path they aborted the walk, but the views were pleasant. They would attempt the walk again but in better conditions and possibly following pathway improvements.

A question was asked about whether there was disabled parking in the first car park. It wasn't thought that there were these spaces. Furthermore, the disabled parking spaces in the nearby Watersports Centre wasn't an area covered by Wardens and it wasn't an area that was enforceable.

BFC officers advised it shouldn't be a problem using the Activity Centre car park. There might be some discretion required if an event was being held to keep these spaces available. Furthermore, signage for the car park could be improved and the Cafe approached to check if they had solutions for providing better access to use this facility.

(Action: BFC and the Horseshoe Lake site ranger)

Rob provided an update on Binfield Footpath 11 where partnership work had been undertaken to improve a 400-metre section of this footpath.

This was a popular footpath, which had seen a huge increase in use especially since the housing estate on Amen Corner North had been finished. The route allowed an excellent countryside walk from the housing estate to Pope's Meadow and wider Binfield, and vice versa.

The improvements focused on resurfacing work of a section that seasonally gets very muddy. There was also some vegetation clearance to maintain clear access. Binfield Parish Council had provided the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for the improvements, which had been arranged by Bracknell Forest Council.

The northern section, where it kinked eastwards towards Murrell Hill Lane, did still get a little bit wet due to the hydrology of the area. This would be the second stage of a project to improve this footpath, but further thought was required on improving it.

(Action: BFC)

Work had made it substantially better and access had been improved into Pockets Copse. Although private land, they were liaising with the landowner at the time of these improvements, they were happy for people to be walking on there.

6. Hazelwood Lane Surface Condition

Attendees received an update on the Hazelwood Lane surface condition. Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) had applied to the Council to temporarily close a right of way (the Hazelwood Lane bridleway) to carry out some works in Autumn 2023.

The work to replace the electricity poles was completed in less than five days. Unfortunately, the use of heavy machinery and the wet conditions had resulted in damage to the surface of the bridleway.

Officers had been working with SSEN to ensure the surface condition would be reinstated once the weather improved. Signage had been put up advising users of the circumstances.

Dennis was thanked for the pictures of the damage to the bridleway surface. Denis reported that, in its current condition, the bridleway was practically impassable to walkers. There was ankle deep mud in the middle and brambles on either side. This information had been used and sent to SSEN so reminded of its responsibility and they had confirmed in writing of their intention to complete the surface reinstatement when the conditions were right.

(Action: BFC to continue to pursue this with SSEN when conditions were right)

7. Hedge Lane TTRO

Attendees were advised that the Council had processed a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) to temporarily close Hedge Lane - Warfield Bridleway 26. This bridleway runs from Maize Lane to Old Priory Lane. The closure was required to allow essential works to continue with the development.

The bridleway was closed predominantly for safety concerns, while the work was underway. There were also improvements intended to the bridleway itself. The closure was for up to six months or when the works were completed, whichever was sooner.

Temporary diversion routes had been put in place, albeit there were no suitable alternative and connecting off-road routes for horse riders. The diversions were along generally quiet lanes of Maize Lane and Old Priory Lane, and either Harvest Ride to the south or Warfield Street to the north. It was a big closure of a popular bridleway and officers had done communication on social media as well as the new directory on the website.

8. **Definitive Map Consolidation**

Attendees were advised that the definitive map consolidation had been a major exercise for the team. This was a legal record of public rights of way for the area it covered. It would be kept and maintained by the relevant local highway authority. It listed all the bridleways, footpaths, byways and restricted byways. It had last been consolidated over a decade ago.

Maps would be accessible via the website and copies available at Times Square. Online, they would be in a similar format to how they are currently provided, with PDF copies of the maps and statement available to view and download. The map pages would be split into 8 sections. An interactive rights of way map was also available for the public to view from the council's website. Whilst this was up-to-date, it wasn't the legal record of rights of way.

A member raised the point about how Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) were important components of outdoor access. While they wouldn't qualify for including on the Definitive Map, as they were not rights of way, they did feature heavily in the rights of way improvement plan.

(Action: BFC to arrange for a link to be put on the Councils' definitive map web page, to the SANGs page where people could find further information).

It was noted that the information from the list went onto the Ordinance Survey so was very valuable resource.

Specific updates:

Mosses Path

As raised previously, there had been discussion about the creation of a formal public footpath (right of way) along the permissive Mosses Path route. The Council had made some improvements to the path surface using Section 106 developer funding. This would make the path more accessible and clearly defined. The council was in the process of drawing up the required legal paperwork, which included a dedication agreement and the modification order.

(Action: BFC to bring an update to the next meeting)

Binfield bridleway deletion

Officers were working to process the extinguishment of a short section of redundant bridleway in Binfield. Binfield BR23a was unused, as it met a dead-end with the M4 motorway. It was a condition of Binfield Parish Council that the footpath dedication would help to offset the loss of rights of way in the parish, caused by the bridleway deletion. It made sense therefore to prioritise the footpath creation first.

Sheila asked about dedications of a footpath and if there was any sort of opening ceremony planned. This was something officers would consider when the process to add the footpath has been completed. LCAF members expressed interest in being involved in such an event. This would also help to evidence path use, which was required as part of the legal process used to dedicate the footpath.

(Action: BFC to follow-up)

Winkfield Footpaths 19 and 13

Officers updated members on recent steps taken to resolve this long-running issue about the diversion of public footpaths across private land. BFC officers had met with the Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club (RCBPC) and their contractors, on site. They had agreed plans for taking this matter forward.

The proposed diversion is currently quite wet, muddy and rutted in places. There is an agreement with RPBC to surface the section from the junction with footpath 7 with aggregate as well as improving some of the drainage to the adjacent ditch providing an improved, year round surface, as well as providing RBPC with necessary access to some of the north eastern horse paddocks. The middle section is along a main trackway, which is walkable and suitably surfaced. It does have shared use, but the traffic along there is very minor. Similarly, the southern section linking footpath 13 up to 19 is mainly along a surfaced track linked to across managed grassland. The northern section is across a grassed polo pitch and avoids cutting across the top corner of an existing playing pitch.

The western section of the diversion is within an existing and remaining works area. RPBC agreed to a smaller, shorter diversion route which will allow walkers to bypass the works area.

Works were agreed to be completed by May 2024 by the RBPC and that also included the marking of those routes, as well as a slight widening of a ditch crossing into the works area. Upon inspection in May officers would then be able to confirm the diversion order, making the path an official route. At this point the Polo Club would have to work with the Council to apply for a secondary smaller TTRO (temporary closure) for the remaining works area.

Having gone on for a long period of time, attendees agreed how lovely it would be to see this matter finally resolved.

(Action: BFC to continue to follow-up with RCBPC and to provide LCAF with an update at the next meeting)

9. PRow and Local Development

Drawings had been received from planning in terms of the development and highlighted the Western section of Hedge Lane. The diagram showed the newly surfaced bridleway with the necessary crossing. The road crossings would be like those on Avery Lane. In terms of the ditch works, they did exist but were redundant and defunct. They caused flooding and waterlogging. The ditches would be improved by removing vegetation which would help with better flow to alleviate some of that flooding.

It was confirmed that there wouldn't be a closure of Hedge Lane for a second time. It was noted that there were a lot of upset people in Warfield because of this closure,

because it was a very popular right of way but it was understood that this was out of BFC's hands.

10. **Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs)**

Rob provided the Forum with an update on recent SANG improvements. In terms of Shepherd Meadows North, or Shepherd Meadow Extension SANG, which were areas of the Memorial Park officers were working with Sandhurst Town Council to improve accessibility for. These would link back to the wider Shepherd Meadows SANG. This was at stage one of the enhancement work and funding came from Section 106 monies and it was not received all at once but incrementally.

Members queried the width of the small bridge shown in one of the presentation pictures. Officers explained it was about 1.2 metres wide and contained a non-slip surface, so should provide good access when using it. Members felt it was a good place for a future potential site visit.

(Action: Chair to follow-up)

11. **Any Other Business**

The Chair opened the floor for questions and observations.

The Forum was made aware that the landowners had been experiencing some security issues along Mare Lane, from Phoenix Fishery to the motorway. As such, logs and other objects were being put in the restricted byway, blocking access to that section. Whilst the restricted byway does come to a dead end for users such as horse riders, it does still get used and there was a footpath linking off it, which was also useful.

Working alongside the landowner and the leaseholder, officers were going to install a bridleway gate which would restrict illegal use by quad bikes, speeding motorbikes and other issues which were being experienced. It would still allow for required vehicle access by the landowner and year-round access for restricted byway users. There was also an understanding that once the gate went in, all the vegetation around that entranceway would be cleared.

Officers updated members on the replacement of the footbridge on Warfield Footpath 6, which went from Malt Hill to Brockhill along the new Windmill SANG. The bridge crossing over the culvert is about a third of the way down from Malt Hill. A contractor was starting next week who was going to replace that bridge and put a new bridge in. A Temporary Traffic Regulation Notice (TTRN) was in place for a five-day closure.

Sheila raised the matter about the Hayley Green track use. Following submission of the evidence forms to Bracknell Forest Council, there had initially been an expectation that this would trigger the process to investigate if there was enough evidence to make a claim for an unrecorded right of way based on long, uninterrupted use. BFC had since sent out an update to all involved, advising that to trigger this process they required a formal application to be made to them. The application would be in the form of a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) application. It could take some time to process and once applied for, it was non-transferable i.e. that person/body had to continue with the application for its entirety.

The necessary evidence was required, as well as providing a certification to landowners that they have applied for said use and once the application was received, the certificate and all the user evidence came to the Council who facilitated that process. The Forum noted that for a right of way to be claimed use, it needed to be that 20-year period of unbroken use without signage, without gating, without various other means that would otherwise make that process redundant. It would also need to relate to the entire length of the route. Although the Council did obtain some evidence, such as resident forms, it was the applicant who was expected to collect other evidence. Sheila highlighted how a request has been put to Warfield Parish Council, to head-up the bid. Members felt the parish council might be an ideal applicant and would have an interest with the residents in mind. The idea for a permissive path was dismissed by the landowners at the time it was raised. Ramblers was also suggested as an alternative organisation to put forward an application.

Rose advised that the Council have been approached by Surrey County Council who were in the process of reviewing and updating their rights of way improvement plan. It was particularly interested in current or future cross boundary or access projects, routes or promotion. They would be putting some feedback together, noting thoughts from the Forum that there was possibly no cross boundary footpaths or rights of way.

Hugh had made a request of an entrance to Frost Folly from Church Lane and if there was anything that could be done to progress that. It was noted that discussions had taken place with planning and highways it needed to establish where the entrance way should go. There were some initial concerns from highways in terms of the bend, **(Action: Rob, Hugh, Colin to visit site to look for a possible entrance way).**

Rose brought to the Forums attention the walks for wellbeing programme, which was currently run by the public health team. The information was available on the public health portal and information would be placed on notice boards.

[Walks for Wellbeing - Public Health Portal - Bracknell Forest Council | \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/walks-for-wellbeing)

Sheila asked in terms of the Blue Mountain and Amen Corner SANGs which she had been invited to view both sites next week. Officers did not have an update on the adoption of these. There was a meeting booked with the parish council so were looking into it with the various parties that were involved. The sites were really degrading now and need funding to bring up to standard to be adopted.

(Action: Sheila to bring an update on her visit to the next meeting)

Sheila asked about the proposals for new public rights of way in Appendix 2. She asked who pursued them because she had one of interest which was the link from Cabbage Hill SANG across to Hazelwood Lane. Officers were aware of this and continued to pursue working on it but there was limited time and resources. They would try and provide an update to the next meeting.

12. **Public Question Time**

No questions raised – no members of the public in attendance.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday the 4th June 2024 at pm. It would follow in the same format, and would celebrate, hopefully, the polo pitch

paths having been completed. The meeting would be hybrid, taking place in person in the council chamber and on Teams.