

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
4 JUNE 2024
7.30 - 9.20 PM**



Present Members:

Colin Bird (Chair)
Richard Elsbury
Hugh Fitzwilliams
Sharon Fletcher
Les Langley
Sue McDaid
Geoff Paxton
Michael Brossard
Councillor Sheila Collings
Denis Crampton
Michael Ballard

Officers In attendance:

Stephen Chown, Head of Parks and Countryside
Robert Solomon, SANG and Rights of Way Officer
Rose Wicks, Data & Communications Officer

Guest Speaker:

Richard Everett, The Crown Estate

Observers:

Councillor Tricia Brown
Councillor Guy Gillbe

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Cherise Welch
Jenny Yung
Geoff Paxton

14. Welcome/Apologies

The Chair welcomed the Forum to the meeting.

It was noted that Richard Everett was present as a guest to provide an update from The Crown Estate. Furthermore, two Bracknell Forest Councillors were present as observers; Cllr Gillbe, Executive Member for Planning, Transport and Countryside, and Cllr Brown, Chair of the Planning Committee. The Chair invited the Cllrs to contribute to matters discussed during the meeting. This would keep proceedings informal and inclusive.

15. Changes to Membership

It was noted there had been no formal changes to the membership since the last meeting. The Forum was reminded that the position of Vice-Chair remained vacant

and any member who was interested in taking on the role were asked to contact the Chair following the meeting. Potential training options could be explored if this could benefit anyone volunteering to take on this new role.

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

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

A summary of progress on the action points from the meeting was included in Appendix 1 of the agenda reports pack. It was agreed that Cllr Collings would provide an update on Blue Mountain and Amen Corner SANGs during Item 12: Rights of Way and Local Development.

It was noted that Appendix 2 of the agenda reports pack included updates on the proposals for new or modified Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) and access routes.

17. **Update from The Crown Estate**

Richard Everett, Chief Forester of the Crown Estate, provided an update from the Crown Richard Everett, Chief Forester of The Crown Estate, provided an update.

Richard informed the Forum that a drive to prevent anti-social behaviour had begun in Swinley Forest. Unauthorised access by both petrol and electric motorbikes had been the most prevalent issue within the forest. Forest wardens had identified several points of access where this had been originating from. This intelligence had been shared with Thames Vally Police (TVP). This had helped the police in apprehending an individual with an electric motorbike. The outcome was that several section 59 notices were issued to the individuals involved. This work with TVP would be ongoing, to prevent further anti-social behaviour within the forest.

Over the winter there had been ongoing work to keep as much of each site open as possible, whilst quickly repairing any damage. The poor weather had made this winter particularly difficult. Signage both onsite and online had been posted to keep the public up to date with any areas that needed to be closed off.

A code of practice for dog walkers on The Crown Estate land was being produced. A new signage policy was also being produced. It was hoped both policies would be launched later in the summer.

Following feedback from the last meeting, the path around the back of Swinley depot had been investigated. Work to resolve issues with accessibility could be carried out, albeit it had so far been delayed due to the weather being extremely wet.

In questions and comments the following points were raised and noted:

- A few accidents with motorbikes and the public had only been narrowly avoided in Swinley Forest. There had also been cases of collisions with other mountain bikers on the trails.
- Implementing installation of new Ramblers Route signs remained in progress.
- Due to the quality of battery, electric motorbikes pose a greater fire risk than e-bikes.
- In future The Crown Estate would also notify Crowthorne Parish Council of any major work happening on site. This follows feedback received from tree work carried out along Crowthorne Road.

Estate.

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18. **Access for all**

Les Langley and Sharon Fletcher had undertaken visits to Shepherd Meadows, Englemere Pond and Ambarrow Pond. The purpose of the visits was to test the sites' accessibility, while enjoying what each had to offer. Full reports on the visits had been produced and Sharon would email them to Rose for circulation to members.
(Action)

An account of the visits to Shepherd Meadows and Englemere Pond was given to members and a summary is given below:

Shepherd Meadows:

Following the Forum's visit to Shepherd Meadows, Les and Sharon returned a few days later. This was to see how the walk differed at a different time of the day when different gates were shut. Despite there being some issues with the condition of the paths, Les and Sharon were able to travel further than expected on the path and felt the walk had been accessible and enjoyable. The Chair noted the local ranger had expressed appreciation for the feedback on accessibility following the walk.

Englemere Pond

Les and Sharon visited Englemere Pond on 2 June. Les and Sharon were unable to find any designated disabled parking, but there was plenty of room available for the van. The site information board was user-friendly, contained good detail and was at an appropriate height for a wheelchair user. Les and Sharon opted to follow the Dragonfly Trail. A small ridge at the start of the trail offered some accessibility issues, however Les was able to get over it with his electric chair.

Signage on the trail was a good height for wheelchair users. Les encountered some difficulties in his wheelchair due to the path's surface regularly changing. The waymarking signs marking the trail were also not very clear, which led to Les and Sharon losing their way. One area of the path contained several fallen trees, which meant wheelchair users would be forced to go off-path to get around these.

In discussion and questions the following points were made:

- It would be worth checking if the waymarkers can be made clearer, by providing more at key points in the trails.
- The information for Englemere Pond, in the Circular Walks leaflet pack, doesn't contain accessibility information, such as path surfacing. Defining anywhere as accessible can be tricky as every disability is different, so one path could be accessible for some, but not for others.

19. Hazelwood Lane Surface Condition

Rose Wicks provided an update on the surface condition of Hazelwood Lane. Damage had been caused to the surface of the bridleway during work carried out to electricity poles by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) in November. This had been made worse by the wet conditions. Following perseverance from BFC officers on this matter, which was supported by the Forum, SSEN reinstated the surface condition of the bridleway in Spring. The work had been delayed owing to needing drier conditions.

An inspection was carried out by Robert Solomon along Hazelwood Lane, which found the path's condition to be much improved. The council received positive feedback from residents and users of the bridleway, on the restored condition of the bridleway.

20. Other Surface Improvements

Robert Solomon gave an account of several paths that officers had identified as having problematic conditions following the winter. These sections included a bottleneck section around the gate of Hazelwood Lane and a low spot of Hawthorndale Lane. Both had been waterlogged through the winter, and their conditions would not improve until there was more consistent dry weather.

Work would continue to highlight the areas most effected by wet conditions and seek to improve their surfaces

21. Hedge Lane Temporary Closure Update

Robert Solomon notified the Forum about a 6-month extension to the closure of Hedge Lane bridleway. The extension to the temporary closure was required due to several difficulties encountered by the developers on that site. The Secretary of State

had approved this extension, meaning the bridleway would now remain shut until February 2025, unless work was finished prior to this period.

It was anticipated the work would improve the surface condition of the bridleway.

22. **Blackwater Valley Bridge Update**

Rose Wicks notified the Forum that funding had been secured to replace the Blackwater Bridge, which had been closed due to its deteriorating condition. The relevant permission was now being sought for that work could begin. It was hoped this work would be completed by the end of 2024. A dedicated webpage had been established for this work, and all updates would be posted to that website.

In discussion the following point was noted:

- This could be a positive news story for the area.
- Discussions had taken place over the possibility of a reopening event for the bridge.
- There had been reports of individuals crossing the closed bridge at great risk. This was being monitored and if deemed necessary the old bridge would be removed to keep the public safe.

23. **Winkfield Footpaths 13 and 19 Diversion**

Rob Solomon confirmed that following extensive discussions with the Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club, the planned diversions for Winkfield footpaths 13 and 19 have now been confirmed. Works agreed with the polo club have largely been completed. A footpath closure (temporary traffic regulation order) and small diversion route remains in place for footpath 19, while these works are finalised. The changes to the footpath routes have been fully signposted.

Rob Solomon, Colin Bird and Geoff Paxton had undertaken a site visit to inspect the diversion and had found the path and signage to be in good condition.

Stephen Chown highlighted this was an example of the Forum using its voice to help bring around this change and end what had been a long running issue.

24. **Definitive Map Modification Order Applications**

Binfield Footpath 2 (ref.108)

Robert Solomon provided an update on the public path diversion order put in place for Binfield Footpath 2. This was a relatively small change made to the line of the footpath. Walkers would now be sent around the outside of the landowner's paddock. This was in the interests of both the landowner and the footpath users, on safety grounds. The required consultation period had been completed with no objections. The diversion had a minimum width of 1.5M. It had been agreed with the landowner, they were responsible for maintaining the hedge and all vegetation from their land. This would make sure the footpath remained clear.

Arising from the discussion the following points were made:

- It was welcomed that the landowner had agreed to take responsibility for maintaining the hedge and vegetation.

- The fence would be necessary for the landowner to protect the livestock and the public.

The Forum thanked Robert for resolving the issue.

Sandhurst Footpath 12 / Finch 20 (ref.106)

Rose Wicks updated the Forum on the British Horse Society (BHS) application to upgrade Sandhurst footpath 12 to a bridleway. This was a joint application sent to Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council. Once received the local authority is duty bound to consider the application. Bracknell Forest Council had reached out to Wokingham Borough Council to liaise on the issue and ensure both authorities' processes were aligned in handling the application.

There was a legal duty for this application to be considered impartially, and once any decision had made it would go through the Council decision making process. A further update would be given at the next meeting. **(Action Rose)**

The Chair noted that the application for a modification order appeared to be due to a claim of 20 years unchallenged use by horses along this path. Even if it was being de-facto used as a bridleway, large sections of the path were unsafe for use by horses or bicycles. A considerable amount of work would be needed to ensure the path was safe for use. This would likely come at a significant cost. However, if this could be achieved it would help create a very nice route for horses and bikes from Simons Wood down to Horseshoe Lake.

Peterhouse Close and Merton Close (ref.107)

Robert Solomon provided an update on an application to add a footpath between Peterhouse Close and Merton Close to the Definitive Map and Statement. This was a DMMO application based on long-term unchallenged use. The path until recently had been an open alleyway that was privately owned by 11 Peterhouse Close. Recently however the owners had installed a gate along this path. Over 40 user evidence forms had now been submitted in relation to this.

This again had to be considered impartially by the local authority, who was in the process of analysing the user evidence forms and communicating with the landowners.

A further update would be given at the next meeting. **(Action Robert)**

25. **Rights Of Way and Local Development**

The Forum was notified a planning application had been submitted to increase the number of houses on Windmill Hill Farm. The application would mean an additional access point to Warfield Footpath 6.

The Forum agreed that it would be helpful to link Warfield Footpath 6 into the Windmill Hill SANG, however this would need to be done independently of the planning process.

Cllr Collings provided an update on the lack adoption of the Blue Mountain and Amen Corner SANGs, which had been raised at the previous meeting. Cllr Collings visited both sites with the resident who had raised the concerns in February. Evidence had been found that only limited maintenance was being taking place, and both sites were becoming increasingly neglected.

Subsequently a planning application had gone in for a wet basin at Blue Mountain and it was hoped that if approved, the S106 would allow for the site to be managed by a third party.

Stephen Chown reiterated the difficulty the local authority had in resolving these matters due to its limited powers. Assuming the planning process is completed, it would still remain in the developers control over who would run the SANG for them. Whilst the local authority prefers to take control of the SANGs management themselves, the decision is ultimately that of the developers. However, through the S106 process, the developers would have to prove the group selected to maintain the SANG are able to run it to the required level.

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26. **Proposed Southern Entrance to Frost Folly**

Robert Solomon updated the Forum about plans to install a southern footpath entrance to Frost Folly. Good progress was being made with the proposal. Ongoing work included: setting specifications and consulting with residents and councillors. The local authority was also getting quotations from developers to undertake this work.

Following some concerns from a local resident it had been agreed to move the proposed gate 10m to the west of the original proposed site, to minimise any disruption for property access.

The Forum noted the progress being made and extended thanks to Hugh Fitzwilliams who had initially highlighted the need for a southern entrance.

27. **Any Other Business**

Robert Solomon highlighted difficulties experienced on Binfield Footpath 10 with sustained waterlogging. A local pond's failure to use the sub-drainage had been identified as the cause. It was believed that it could take some time to fix the system.

Work had also been carried out to improve the access to Warfield Footpath 5, following land boundary disputes between residents. An unauthorised pedestrian gate had been placed on the public right of way. Following productive discussions with residents this had now been resolved. A new gap was established 2 and a half metres to one side of the original path.

Hugh Fitzwilliams notified the Forum that Jealott's Hill Community Landshare was to reopen on 29th June. Two Walks from Jealott's Hill had been planned for 11am on the day, with the main reopening event to start at 12:30pm.

28. **Public Question Time**

There were no questions from the public.

29. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 8 October 2024.