

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
29 MARCH 2011
7.00 - 9.10 PM**



Present:

Members:

Mr Michael Abbott (Chairman)
Councillor Norman Bowers
Councillor Michael Brossard
John Deakin
Mr Joe Dodson
Sharon Holt
Mr Peter Radband

In attendance:

Hugh Fitzwilliams, Rights of Way Ranger, BFC
Graham Pockett, Parks & Countryside Development Officer
David Putt, Be Heard
Amanda Roden, Democratic Services Assistant
Richard Walton, Head of Parks & Countryside
Rose Wicks, Parks & Countryside Projects Officer

Observers:

Mrs D M Smith, Mid & West Berkshire LAF

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr Mike Gates

15. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all members to the Forum.

16. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2010 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute 4, Thames Basin Heath and SANGs

The final sentence should read 'The SPA was protected under National and International Law. SANGs were a mitigation measure to protect this important area.'

17. Membership and Recruitment

John Deakin, Chief Forrester at the Crown Estate, had submitted an application to become a member of the Local Countryside Access Forum to fill the position vacated by Derick Stickler, former Chief Forrester. This was approved by Forum Members.

18. **National and Regional LCAF Work**

Following the meeting of the Forum on 28 September 2010, comments had been sent to Natural England regarding their future working arrangements with the England Access Forum (EAF). Natural England would be withdrawing funding for the EAF and there had been a consultation regarding how the EAF would be funded in the future.

The South East Regional Symposium would be held on 7 April 2011 at the Quaker House on Euston Road in London. Up to four members from each LAF in the south east region were invited to attend the regional symposium, along with two officers from each local authority.

The County Surveyors meeting in January 2011 was cancelled due to bad weather.

Forum members discussed a letter sent to all English Access Forums from The British Horse Society regarding equestrian access. It was indicated there were approximately 1.3 million horses in the UK which was the equivalent of 17 horses per 100 people. Many bridleways had been lost over the years and people now needed to pay to access forests. There were similar restrictions for cyclists when accessing forests.

It would be useful to keep bridleways in good condition, linked up, and with safer verges, so that horses did not need to use roads. There were many horses in the Binfield and Warfield areas. Sand tracks in Windsor Great Park were being used by walkers and cyclists but they had been laid for horses.

The British Horse Society was attempting to locate old bridleways by 2026 or they could be lost. After the second world war many were taken off maps but research needed to be undertaken in relation to rights of way and ancient paths to add them to maps.

Emphasis on improving bridleways would be incorporated into the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

(Action: Rose Wicks)

It was suggested that a letter from a community representative may be received more positively by landowners being approached regarding permissive bridleways, than a letter from Bracknell Forest Council.

(Action: Sharon Holt)

19. **Mid-Term Review of ROWIP and Definitive Map and Statement Review**

The Bracknell Forest ROWIP was first produced in 2006 and was currently being reviewed. It was compulsory to undertake a review of the plan midway through its term to identify progress with actions and changes in policies.

Forum members considered the action plan and statistics from the plan. It was no longer necessary to report on the best value performance indicator (BVPI) but the Parks and Countryside Team would continue to undertake this as it was felt to be useful. Bracknell Forest had a high scoring but the area did benefit from a manageable rights of way network compared to other areas.

Good progress had been made with undertaking actions identified in the plan, however it was noted that the plan was aspirational and constraints to some actions meant that they were not able to be undertaken. Actions for the future were welcomed from Forum members and should be forwarded to Rose Wicks by the end

of May 2011. It was suggested that an electronic Word template be circulated for Forum members to complete.

(Action: All/Rose Wicks)

20. **Thames Basin Heath and SANGS**

Forum members received an update on Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGs) and the access management proposals in relation to the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA).

The Parks and Countryside Service had been working with Natural England to undertake onsite improvement works which would create opportunities for informal recreation and encourage visitors away from more sensitive sites where there were ground nesting birds such as the Dartford Warbler. An example of this work was the new signs that had been installed at Englemere Pond to improve the site entrance.

Six recreational areas were currently being developed as SANGs in Bracknell Forest with funding from residential proposals but slow development had caused the flow of funding to slow as well. The aim was to maximise potential recreational areas in advance of development. The areas included the cut countryside corridor, dropped curbs at Harvest Ride, and Ambarrow Court in Sandhurst. Timber had been secured from the Crown Estate through work at Queen Anne's Gulley and priming works were being undertaken at Shepherd Meadows in advance of development contributions.

Smaller developments could cost several hundred pounds each and there was a substantial amount of funding available from approved planning applications. £88,000 had been spent so far and strong follow-up data was needed to collate this. There were eleven planning authorities in the Thames Basin Heath SPA and all areas needed to work together to undertake monitoring work for SANGs and further visits.

Access Management Measures

Natural England would take more of a lead role in relation to funding and priority changes. Funding would be forwarded in relation to the SPA element and difficulties would be overcome with co-ordinated action. Some organisations were bidding for funding. The mechanisms the measures were funded by had been agreed and local authorities were collating contributions for a central fund.

Bracknell Forest had some funding for access management measures and Natural England had confirmed that this funding could be spent locally in Bracknell Forest. A biodiversity officer at Bracknell Forest Council was currently working on this to identify areas, such as Crowthorne and Sandhurst, educational projects at Heathlands, Edgbarrow School, and possible working with the Wildlife Trust and Fire Authority.

There were new supporting planning documents in relation to the Thames Basin Heath SPA. Bracknell Forest Council would discuss formalising arrangements and more efficient ways of securing funding at a meeting of the Executive in May.

21. **Green Flag Award**

Bracknell Forest had received three Green Flag awards for Parks and Countryside sites: Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park (a joint entry with Sandhurst Town Council), Lily Hill Park and Pope's Meadow. Mystery shopper visits would be undertaken in alternate years rather than full judging and there would be some funding reductions.

The judging criteria remained the same but improvement needed to be demonstrated at the sites. The judges' feedback and the review of the management plan would be used to update next year's management plans. This information would be available on the Parks and Countryside pages of Bracknell Forest Council's website. Site visits would be organised to identify what needed to be undertaken before the judges' visit.

22. **Parks and Countryside Leaflet Review**

Progress had been made in relation to updating the Parks and Countryside site leaflets – Pope's Meadow and Shepherd Meadows & Sandhurst Memorial Park. There had been some major changes, for example, a reduction in the amount of text on each leaflet. Hard copies of the leaflets were available from Rose Wicks. The leaflets would be distributed to the main libraries in Bracknell Forest and The Look Out. Some revisions were still needed to update the remaining stock of leaflets, for example, updating the Bracknell Forest logo. Forum members would be kept updated regarding progress.

Biodiversity leaflets would be light blue, gardening for wildlife leaflets would be green, and events leaflets would be orange. The new Planning and Biodiversity Guidance leaflet had been sent to the Planning Department for them to comment on accuracy. The manager at Lily Hill Park had been consulted regarding revisions to the site leaflet and had some good ideas regarding how to make it visually appealing which were being worked up.

Forum members should contact Rose Wicks if any errors were found in the leaflets, as any amendments needed could be taken into account for the next print run.

(Action: All)

23. **Draft 2010 Annual LCAF Report**

It was a requirement to produce an annual report for the LCAF. A draft version of the annual report for 2010 was tabled. The report covered more LCAF work than in previous years and it had been given a glossier look. Comments were invited from Forum members by the end of April 2011. Forum members were also invited to contribute articles to the report if they wished.

(Action: All)

On page 2 of the report, Item 2, Diana Pidgeon was OBE rather than MBE.

24. **Site Visits**

Forum members discussed the facilities available for countryside walks in Bracknell Forest, as it had been mentioned that there was a lack of facilities for people with disabilities. It was felt that people with disabilities should be advised of where facilities were available prior to embarking on countryside excursions and that information on facilities should be available in promotional material regarding countryside sites.

Previous site visits had included the Crown Estate at Cranbourne Chase, led by Chief Forrester John Deakin, a Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) walk to trial part of the proposed 'easy going' route at the Great Windsor Park, and a joint site visit with the Biodiversity Forum at Horseshoe Lake to see migrating birds and links to the Blackwater Valley Corridor.

Suggested future site visits included:

- The RAF site, The Parks – sports pitches and meadow grass areas would likely be completed before the end of 2011. A possible joint visit with the Biodiversity Forum.
- South Hill Park – the main profile areas were opening soon, otherwise November onwards or Spring 2012 would be good times to visit.
- Englemere Pond
- Swinley Park – Kings Ride, Swinley South or the Park itself.
- Bluebell Walk – possibly Ambarrow Court or the Three Copses and links to the Cut Countryside Corridor.
- A 'boardwalk walk' looking at various sites with timber and recycled plastic boardwalks.

25. **Accessibility**

It was reported that Disabled Go provided detailed online access guides to a wide range of venues accessible by members of the public such as cinemas, hotels, hospitals, colleges, sports grounds, restaurants, council offices, parks, historic land marks, and tourist attractions. The information provided by Disabled Go aimed to empower disabled people to make their own informed decisions as to the usability of a venue based on their own particular access requirements.

Disabled Go provided targeted information regarding facilities for disabled people. It was a web based initiative where trained surveyors visited sites to assess their accessibility in relation to physical access, lighting, background noise etc.

Accessibility could include, for example, reducing the height of rises in relation to stiles. Problems could occur if stiles were removed altogether due to cattle in countryside areas. Gates should be accessible where possible and stiles should be used as a last resort. There was not usually enough space either side of stiles for suitable alternatives.

26. **Reports from Officers**

Photo Competition

A Parks Photo Competition was undertaken annually in Bracknell Forest. One hundred photos were entered into the 'Capturing Biodiversity in the Natural World' competition in 2010 and the winning entries were being displayed at South Hill Park until 3 April 2011. The top three winners, seven runners up and another seven added as well.

Forum members were invited to suggest themes for this year's photo competition.

(Action: All)

Ideas upon which the 2011 photo competition could be based included:

- International Year of Forests
- Accessing Bracknell Forest
- Accessing Trees and Roots

Hugh Fitzwilliams' suggested theme 'Routes and Trees' was favourably received by members and officers.

Entrants to the competition would need to sign a waiver or model release form to give permission for their photos to be publicised if they included recognisable images of people.

The South Hill Park Community Restoration project exhibition would be available from 16 April 2011 to 19 June 2011. Information regarding this could be found on South Hill Park's website. The Bracknell Camera Club would be cataloguing the project from start to finish through a series of photos.

Britain In Bloom

Bracknell was named winner of the 'small city' class receiving gold in the RHS Thames and Chilterns in Bloom group. Bracknell also received the regional award for Best Floral Input and Best Portfolio City. Ranelagh School received a commendation in the Mark Mattock Schools Challenge Cup for horticultural and environmental achievement. Bracknell Town Council would take over the organisation for Britain in Bloom in Bracknell.

Bracknell Footpath 15

The temporary closure and diversion of Bracknell Footpath 15 was still in force whilst infrastructure road was constructed. A six month temporary traffic regulation order had been extended by the Secretary of State until October 2011 to allow for works to be completed. The one objection which had been received against the permanent diversion of Footpath 15 had been withdrawn, the order would be confirmed when the new path and footpath signage was in place.

Sandhurst Footpaths 4 and 15

Resurfacing works, funded by Ward Members, were being undertaken by Ringway from the southern end of the bridge to Perry Hill Drive. Modification orders needed to be investigated. The defined width of the footpath would be included in the Definitive Statement.

The landowner in the area of Sandhurst Footpath 15 had requested for the footpath to be removed. A Register of Modification Order Applications had been created and was available on Bracknell Forest Council's website.

Bracknell Footpath 20

An application was awaited for a temporary closure to Bracknell Footpath 20 as Waitrose had expressed a wish to build a boardwalk over the footpath. The footpath would be closed for three months from after Easter until the end of summer. Agreement would be sought that the footpath would be well managed. It was suggested that Forum members could visit the site once completed.

Chaucer Woods

The Children's Playground Company had installed new equipment in keeping with the woodland character, aimed at children up to 8 years of age. Design proposals for other areas of the park were awaited following recommendations received from a police neighbourhood inspector. Chaucer Woods in Crowthorne was owned by Wellington College and there was a S106 agreement in relation to providing recreational areas. The area was open to the public.

Lock's Ride

Parish and Town Councils in Bracknell Forest had supported the implementation of improvements to Lock's Ride following the receipt of Section 106 funding from Bracknell Forest Council. This site would be the last of the playbuilder sites in Bracknell Forest.

The Look Out

A project being undertaken at The Look Out with playbuilder funding was due to be completed soon.

South Hill Park

The new boardwalk opened at South Hill Park on 10 March 2011. Restoration work would continue along the terrace and it was planned that works to the front and rear of the Arts Centre would be completed by Easter 2011. Replanting and lake de-silting was being undertaken. The project had caught the attention of the Environment Agency which was impressed with the work being undertaken.

An arts design project would be utilised to create new signage and a sculpture. Sixty five design applications had been received and four people had been shortlisted for interview.

Work was being undertaken with Highways Engineers in relation to gateways on Ringmead and design of gate pillars close to the gas mains and BT cables. Links and crossing points would be transformed; there would be a new crossing point and a central point.

Savernake Pond

Thames Water had cleared over eight hundred tonnes of silt and rubbish out of Savernake Pond. Work was being undertaken to plant beds near to the car park, to improve the car park's surface and repaint the red railings around the balancing pond to a green colour which better suited the character of the park.

27. **Reports from Members round the table**

Sharon Holt reported that The British Horse Society was encouraging people to wear high visibility clothing when riding. The Parks and Countryside Service would arrange for more pictures to be taken to publicise this and ensure future publicity material contained these images.

(Action: Rose Wicks/ Sharon Holt)

28. **Public Question Time**

Mrs Diane Smith reported that Mid and West Berkshire was holding a public Forum on 25 May 2011 regarding parks and rights of way. Further details would be circulated to Forum members.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

29. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 20 September 2011, 7pm, Function Room, 5th Floor, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell.

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