

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
27 MARCH 2012
7.00 - 9.45 PM**



Present:

Members:

Mr Michael Abbott (Chairman)
Councillor Michael Brossard
John Deakin
Sharon Holt
Mr Innes McEwen
Mr Richard Mosses
Councillor John Porter

In attendance:

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr Joe Dodson
Mrs D M Smith, Mid & West Berkshire LAF

14. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2011 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute 4, National and Regional LCAF Work

In the sixth paragraph, it should read 'The total length of the Crouch Lane bridleway' rather than 'The section of the Hawthorne Lane bridleway'.

15. Membership and Recruitment

It was reported that Joe Dodson had moved out of the borough and had therefore submitted his resignation to the Forum. It was suggested that it may be worth considering recruiting more members to the Forum. Joe represented cycling interests but it would also be useful to have someone who represented disabled interests on the Forum.

David Putt would be contacted regarding his possible membership of the Forum. He could represent the interests of the community landshare project at Jealotts Hill.

(Action: Graham Pockett)

Sharon Holt had contacted some land owners to see if they would be interested in supporting work undertaken by the Forum. Thames Water were the only land owner

to reply so far and they were unable to commit due to a lack of resources and structure changes within the organisation.

A combined LCAF and Biodiversity Forum site visit to FC Crowthorne Woods in the summer was proposed and this would provide a good opportunity to publicise the Forum's work and attract new members. A press release, photos, and the use of social media and Town and Country, would be used to attract new members. Sandhurst News and Crowthorne News were considered to be good methods of communication and Radio Berkshire was also suggested.

Local Access Forum work was becoming more important due to the localism agenda coming from central government. People would need to join the Forum as individuals rather than being representative of an organisation. It was suggested that an advert regarding recruitment of new members could be added to the cycling brochure but there were no plans to revise this brochure at present and there had been a budget cut in relation to leaflet publications.

Recruitment could be advertised on the LCAF page of the Council's website.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

16. **National and Regional LCAF Work**

Natural England were co-ordinating a new grant scheme which would encourage and enable local communities to work with land owners to develop and enhance local public paths in ways that would deliver wider benefit. £1 million per annum would be divided between schemes nationally this and next financial year. There was an emphasis on funding for rural schemes, active promotion of rights of way and adding value to the local economy. Evidence of this was needed for grant claims and Local Access Forums and Highway Authorities should be involved where appropriate.

In most cases there would be a 75% grant and the remaining 25% could be funded by other groups, although 100% grants were possible. Some of the quality improvements proposed to the Borough's Rights of Way network in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan may qualify for funding. There was an online form and guidance document in relation to the grant funding. Ineligible schemes should 'self-select out'. There was possible landowner compensation and national trails would likely be popular ideas for schemes.

The Grants Panel would meet monthly and funding would be given as part of an ongoing process over two years. The scheme was open for applications on Monday 23 April 2012.

Comments or feedback on possible schemes to put forward for the grant funding should be forwarded to Graham Pockett graham.pockett@bracknell-forest.gov.uk or Rose Wicks rose.wicks@bracknell-forest.gov.uk .

(Action: All)

It was queried when West End Lane would be developed and if this could tie in with an application for grant funding. Uncertainty on timescales to deliver this project may be an issue as much depended on the land owner and implementation of the planning condition. Further suggestions included the loop at Peacock Farm; Temple Park as a cycle route could meet up the other side with the Stag and Hounds pub; improving the path from Ambarrow to Horseshoe Lake, and Winkfield Path. The ROWIP would also be considered for likely schemes.

Huddle

Forum members had been contacted in December 2011 regarding joining Huddle, the online Forum for LAFs. Huddle arose out of a need to link up LAFs nationally after a withdrawal of funding for the England Access Forum. This had been in operation for a few months and there was evidence that it was being used by some forums. There was an aim for a minimum of one member and up to three members per LAF to be members of Huddle. Forum members would join Huddle as individuals but it was suggested that members could say that they were representing the views of their local LAF regarding a subject raised at a LAF meeting if it was in the minutes of the meeting.

Volunteers to become involved in Huddle should inform Rose Wicks or Graham Pockett.

(Action: All)

LAF National Conference

The National LAF Conference took place on Tuesday 6 March. Rose Wicks of the Parks and Countryside Service attended the conference on behalf of the LCAF in Bracknell Forest. The Conference was held in Bristol and 46 LAFs attended from all over the UK with different representatives including LAF Chairmen and Local Authority representatives.

Richard Benyon, MP, gave an address via a video link. Pippa Langford, Natural England Chairman then introduced the event, and Andy McIntosh, Natural England went on to give an overview of Natural England's role working with LAFs. Andy would be the new contact for the People and Partnerships Team at Natural England.

There would be funding for LAF Regional Co-ordinators for next year. LAF work on a regional level was of more importance now. Martin Gilchrist, People and Partnership's Team South and Jonathan Clark, South East Regional LAF Representative attended the event. There was a chance for LAFs to be involved with the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013.

Hugh Craddock, Head of the Commons and Access Implementation Team at Defra, gave an overview of Defra's involvement with LAFs and how they were said to be more distant from LAFs. Paul Johnson, Principle Access Specialist at Natural England, attended as a principal specialist on the Paths for Communities Fund. Bids in relation to local riding networks were felt to be favourable and existing links were being updated. Work would be undertaken with existing local programmes.

Rob Leek, of the People and Partnerships Team at Natural England, gave an overview of Huddle. Concern was expressed with regard to the restrictions to the number of memberships per LAF. The cost implications would be investigated further and Huddle was a work in progress.

The LAF handbook was due to be updated. It was suggested that Huddle be used for feedback.

Various workshops took place exploring a range of issues including; shared use paths/multi-user rights, delivering with less, ROWIPs and LTPs and Green Infrastructure.

LAF members expressed that there was confusion regarding changes to rights of way networks, for example with multi-user rights and urban or semi-urban footpaths becoming cycle paths. The importance of good signage was highlighted as evident in

Surrey. Cycle tracks that excluded horses was identified as a concern. Public rights of way were different to cycle tracks and there was an argument for multi-user paths.

Public services such as maintaining rights of way were being cut due to financial implications. There was still money to maintain LAFs via Local Authorities but this was not always ringfenced and with Local Authorities being increasingly squeezed, less money was sometimes being given to LAFs. Commercial sponsorship was sometimes used such as contracted secretariat duties being undertaken by a consultant.

Unitary Authorities were well keyed into integrating ROWIP and LTP issues. There was a need for LAF functions to be taken more seriously as they were statutory advisers on LTPs and ROWIPs. Having better linkage with Highways should help, as would increasing the diversity of membership so that they could communicate to a larger audience and having Councillor support. If LAFs could not encourage key people to agree to attend meetings, then LAF members could potentially sit as representatives on other panels.

LAF Regional Conference

The next LAF Regional Conference would be held at 10.30am to 4pm on 22 May 2012 at the Bloomsbury Suite in London, the same venue as last year. If Forum members wished to attend this event, they should contact Graham Pockett by the morning of the 20 April 2012, as replies to Jonathan Clark were due on this date.

(Action: All)

Bracknell Forest Council could cover travel expenses for Forum members attending this event and there was no cost in relation to the event itself. Lunch would be provided free and officers could attend with up to four Forum members.

Rights of Way Survey

It was reported that paths were checked which were not previously randomly selected after five years. Approximately 43.8% of paths were surveyed and the results scored highly on Best Value Performance Indicator. It was noted that the Rights of Way network in Bracknell Forest was relatively small, and this should be considered when comparing results with those of large county councils in the south east.

Local Nature Partnership

There were plans to set up a Local Nature Partnership for Berkshire. There were workshops in January regarding how people could get involved with health and nature, for example, or communities and nature. There were speakers from the NHS, Thrive, and Kelly Thomas the Local Nature Partnership co-ordinator. Suggestions of the benefits from joined up working between LCAF and the LNP included joint funding bids, a strengthened voice, a central website, and integrated advice to both LCAF and the LNP. Best practice could be learned from other organisations. A Farm Sunday was held last year and approximately 800 people attended. Funding for Local Nature Partnerships was approximately £2 million nationally. Finchampstead Ridges was possibly the closest National Trust land to Bracknell Forest but there were experts at the Crown Estate.

Letter from Richard Benyon MP

Forum members noted that there were four proposals last year in relation to improving the flow of information between Forums, Natural England and Defra and

positive feedback had been received on the consultation process. The suggestion of an annual training event had been a popular idea. The proposal for a memorandum of understanding between Defra or Natural England and LAFs had met with a more mixed response. The role of LAFs was set out in statute, but a memorandum would help to define the support available to LAFs from Defra and Natural England. There was some doubt about having a single LAF member on the Rights of Way Review Committee representing everyone's views at a national level.

Attendance

The Parks and Countryside Service would continue to inform Forum members of LAF meetings in neighbouring authorities if they would like to attend.

17. **Definitive Map and Statement Review**

A review of the Definitive Map and Statement was being undertaken by the Parks and Countryside Service for the first time as a unitary authority; this had previously been undertaken by BABTiE as a Berkshire County arrangement.

There were numerous minor changes needed to the Definitive Statement, including updating road and house names. Significant changes to the Definitive Statement would need to be published twice in the local paper to allow for public consultation.

Major changes to the Definitive Map and Statement included the addition of Bracknell Footpath 24 which ran across Lily Hill Park, Crowthorne Footpath 3 would be shown on the Definitive Map, and there would be a part deletion of Bracknell Footpath 4, which had been the subject of a cycle track order. It was a Planning and Transport division responsibility to undertake cycle track orders. There were several instances where Footpaths had been physically converted to cycle tracks but had not been the subject of a cycle track order. Due to restricted timescales these would not be included in the revised Definitive Map and Statement.

A question was asked relating to the cut off in 2026 for recording historic rights of way and the possible sources of historic evidence of old paths and bridleways. The Berkshire Records Office had maps and ordnance Survey dating back to 1871 and 18th century estate maps. Bracknell was unusual as a New Town, and some footpaths had been taken out with legal orders in 1960s.

18. **Thames Basin Heath and SANGS**

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

There had been improvement works in natural and semi-natural areas. Entrance and car park improvement works had been completed at Englemere Pond, and there had been access improvement works at Jocks and Tinkers Copse. A new path link would form part of the Cut Countryside Corridor.

There was a new crossing at Harvest Ride (drop kerb and central reservation) and new seating. Improvements had been funded by developer contributions, including supporting ongoing maintenance costs.

SPA wide mitigation and avoidance measures could be difficult logistically and legally regarding local authorities operating in a unified way and contributing to onsite measures outside of their respective boundaries. All local authorities were now

signed up to joint working arrangements and Hampshire County Council were acting as 'banker'. Natural England had a day to day delivery role.

Reference was made to an education project with Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxon Wildlife Trust to identify and develop resource material for onsite sessions, for example, at Wildmoor Heath. Children were getting more involved and there were school sessions planned in the autumn and winter, and then out and about on site. There were good links with existing messages such as fire safety.

Potential for generating income was being investigated, for example, through car park charges at The Look Out which would be refunded when accessing The Look Out or Coral Reef. Visitor data was being sought and the possible impact on the SPA project was being looked into.

Horse riders already had to pay for a permit when accessing Swinley Forest, for example from The Look Out car park. The Crown Estate would decide whether riders would need to pay twice but the aim was for there to only be one payment for horse riders. This may mean the existing permit scheme might cease and it would be considered how the site could best serve the needs of users of the site.

19. **2011 Annual LCAF Report**

Natural England provided a template of how LAF annual reports needed to be set out. The LCAF Annual Report 2011 was being drafted with information provided under the following headings: notable events during the year, formal advice given, successes and membership changes. The following information would be included:

- Events including LCAF meetings, site visits and the SELAF Symposium.
- Formal advice given on the review of England Access Forum, ROWIP, modification order applications, footpath diversions and equestrian access.
- Successes such as Thames Basin Heath SPA, access, diversion of Bracknell Footpath 15 and the mid-term review of ROWIP.
- The addition of John Deakin, Crown Estate, to the forum and a change of Chairman from Diane Pidgeon to Mike Abbott.

Any suggestions for further information to be included in the LCAF Annual Report 2011 should be forwarded to Rose Wicks rose.wicks@bracknell-forest.gov.uk as soon as possible.

(Action: All)

20. **Reports from Officers**

Rose Wicks reported that the 'Routes and Trees' themed Parks Photo Competition 2011 was successful. The Games coming to London and the Queen's Jubilee would be the theme for this year's competition with the suggestion of 'Red, White and Blue' in Bracknell's open spaces. A further suggestion was 'Crowned with Rings'.

There was a revised version of the Ramblers Route leaflet which better related the maps to the text. An event was scheduled for September which aimed to celebrate the rights of way network. The Rangers would be involved and Hugh Fitzwilliams would lead some walks.

Tom Newman would lead a cycle ride at the event and there would possibly be a treasure hunt. It was suggested that more Rambling groups could be involved and that different walking, cycling and riding groups could begin from different places on the day. It was suggested that the event could be held on 29 September instead of 22

September. Sharon Holt would either be involved herself or would ask if any horse riders would like to lead a ride. Richard Mosses would mention the event to his contacts within the Ramblers. Innes McEwen had land near Frost Folly and volunteered to be involved.

Ideas for the event should be forwarded to Rose Wicks rose.wicks@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

(Action: All)

Applications for the Green Flag Awards had been submitted. South Hill Park would be entered in 2013, and Bracknell Town Council had entered Jocks Lane for the first time this year. With two open spaces in Winkfield entered, this brought the Borough wide total to six sites.

Graham Pockett reported that Scottish and Southern Energy were undertaking works in the area. A 33V underground electrical cable needed to be supplied to Crowthorne Substation via the Devils Highway restricted byway. There could be an archaeological site in this area and this was a well used right of way. This restricted byway would be closed to carriage drivers for two months while the work was undertaken and there would be a temporary diversion for walkers, cyclists and horse riders on Forestry Commission owned land. The decision would be taken whether the handrails installed on the diversion route should be removed after the works were completed. The work would be undertaken in October and November 2012 after the bird nesting season and the car park would remain open.

Footpath improvements had been completed along parts of Sandhurst Footpaths 13A and 15. Those planned included improving the footpath network near to the Wykery Copse development using S106 contributions. This would create a new circular route and help to protect the SSSI woodland by providing alternative routes for dog walkers close to home. There would be a footpath creation agreement for a new path from the eastern end of Winkfield Footpath 15 at Sunninghill Park to Sunninghill Road opposite Ascot Gate, Windsor Great Park.

There were modification orders in relation to Sandhurst Footpath 15, Sandhurst Footpath 21 and Crowthorne Footpath 8. No compelling legal evidence could be found to remove Sandhurst Footpath 15, so the decision was to decline the application. The decision was taken to decline the application to re-define the widths of Crowthorne Footpath 8 and Sandhurst Footpath 21, as the 1951 Parish Survey provided a record of the width of these footpaths at the time of the first Definitive Map for East Berkshire.

Richard Walton reported that the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy was being updated and the aim was for the refreshed strategy to be published in July 2012. There would be a quality and improvement programme in two phases and the Parish and Town Councils and Ward Members affected in Bracknell Forest would be consulted. The Green Flag standard was considered a useful tool for assessing quality of open spaces, and maintaining and improving quality sites. The strategy would include proposals for capital works using S106 funding across the two phases. Local consultation would be sought regarding projects for phase 2.

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

Sharon Holt reported that horse riders currently only had access to twenty two per cent of public rights of way and horse-drawn vehicle drivers only five percent. Sharon tabled a letter from the British Horse Society that included a quote from Richard Benyon MP about allowing horse riders to utilise more of their off-road networks. This

suggested multi-user routes could be developed if local authorities were co-operative. At a local level it suggested it would be possible to add to the bridle circuit map where horse boxes could park and who carriage drivers could contact to open gates. It was reported that there should be no obstructions with legal carriage ways.

Feedback on different areas where horse riders could ride should be forwarded to Sharon Holt.

(Action: All)

Gill Coates was no longer involved with access issues dealt with by the British Horse Society. Sharon queried how the new woodchip surface on Crouch Lane had survived through the winter, and queried whether another lane would be opened up for horse riders where a lane came out on a busy bend.

Innes McEwen reported that he had completed a higher level stewardship application scheme for the farm. Gate locks had been cut and rural crime was on the increase. It was suggested that suspicious vehicles be reported to Hugh, Innes or the Crown Estate Office. Work was being undertaken with the police in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. It was suggested that there could be a prompt sheet for suspicious things to look out for. This would be drafted for consultation.

(Action: Hugh Fitzwilliams)

22. **Site Visits**

There would be a joint site visit between LCAF and the Biodiversity Forum on 3 July 2012 with Nick Haslett from the Forestry Commission. Spaces were limited. Details of this would be forwarded to Forum members.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

Suggestions for further site visits included the enhancements at South Hill Park. Four trails were being developed with site specific waymarkers. There would be a Victorian Fair at South Hill Park on 21 July 2012 and an Historic Walk at South Hill Park on 12 May 2012. Details of these would be forwarded to Forum members as the events leaflet was nearly complete.

(Action: Rose Wicks)

23. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 2 October 2012, 7pm, Function Room, 5th Floor, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell.