

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM  
2 OCTOBER 2012  
7.00 - 8.40 PM**



**Present:**

**Members:**

Mr Michael Abbott (Chairman)  
Councillor Michael Brossard  
Sharon Holt  
Mr Innes McEwen  
Councillor John Porter  
Mr Peter Radband

**In attendance:**

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

**Observers:**

Jenny Young, Tally Ho Stables

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

John Deakin  
Mr Richard Mosses  
Mrs D M Smith, Mid & West Berkshire LAF  
Richard Walton, Head of Parks & Countryside

**1. Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made around the table.

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2012 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 19, 2011 Annual LCAF Report: Diane Pidgeon would be corrected to Diana Pidgeon OBE.
- Minute 20, Reports from Officers: Footpath improvements had been made to parts of Sandhurst Footpath 13A but not Sandhurst Footpath 15. This would be amended accordingly.

**3. Membership and Recruitment**

The Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum (LCAF) Terms of Reference were attached to the agenda to remind members of its content. The Forum was always keen to expand on its membership and another representative with cycling

interests was being sought to fill in the gap left by Joe Dodson who resigned as a Forum member. There was an advert on the BFC website. If anyone was interested in being a member of the Forum they should contact the Parks and Countryside Service.

Mart Speyers, who led the leisure cycle ride at the Outdoor and Walking Festival, was keen to find out more about LCAF and its membership. Mart owned a local business Total Fitness and was a keen cyclist and general outdoor pursuit's enthusiast. Rose would forward him information regarding the Forum. An advert would be placed in the next Town and Country regarding membership recruitment. Simon Pettigrew had been contacted at Be Heard to gauge interest in attending Forum meetings as a disabled interest representative. It was suggested that David Putt be contacted, to see whether he would like to join the Forum. His current role as Manager of the Jealott's Hill Community Landshare Project would mean he could represent the interests of community groups. It was also suggested that Nick Hazlitt could be contacted as a Forestry representative.

**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

People could become members of the Forum in their own right as well as representing a specialist interest. It was discussed about whether there should be greater representation across different Town and Parish Councils on the Forum. It was also suggested that schools and local colleges could perhaps be contacted in order to attract a younger membership to the Forum.

It was suggested that a greater mix of membership may be useful, such as people of different ethnic backgrounds and disabled groups. A large landowner representative would be useful; Sharon had approached Thames Water who were landowners in the borough but they did not have anyone available.

#### **4. National and Regional LCAF Work**

Rose had attended the South East Region Local Access Forum (LAF) Officers update, which was a useful meeting. There have been 110 expressions of interest for the Paths for Communities funding, with half showing potential. There were mainly village and community groups applying for funding. There had been a few issues to progress; it could be difficult to obtain landowner permission for creating a new Public Right of Way and there were restrictions on how the 25% match funding could be made up, with it needing to come from private developers or fundraising.

Other LAFs were finding it difficult to encourage people to sign up to Huddle, the online forum which had replaced the England Access Forum. Graham Pockett had signed up as an officer. Forum's could now apply for numerous licences for their members, but these were assigned on a first come first serve basis as costs meant there were a limited number. Huddle was informal and once signed up, people did not need to check the website regularly. Sign up to Huddle was not compulsory for Forum members. If members were interested Martin Gilchrist had offered to demonstrate Huddle and a session would be arranged regarding this.

**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

Members were reminded that if anyone was available to attend neighbouring LAF meetings, this would be useful. Rose would check if travel expenses could be claimed for this.

**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

Natural England had an evidence base in relation to access and engagement. Much was known about access to designated green spaces, for example, most people

visited spaces locally, with 40% within a one mile radius and 60% within a two mile radius. There was little evidence regarding non-designated green spaces however. For example, the relationship between biodiversity and recreation; and the quality of the green space in relation to the levels of enjoyment. For more information regarding this, members could contact Rose.

The LAF Regional meeting would be held in May 2013, a date for this was not known yet. There would be just one LAF National conference in 2013, to be held on 27 February in the Midlands.

The new Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP) had now been established and the constitution for this was in the agenda papers. The aim was to improve public access and there would be a closer working relationship between LAFs and LNPs.

## 5. **Definitive Map and Statement Review**

The Definitive Map and Statement Review had been undertaken for the first time in-house; this had been undertaken previously by BAPTIE.

Changes to the Statement required a Modification Order under section 53(3) & (4) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. A Modification Order was required for five changes to the Statement, which involved Public Rights of Way across Binfield, Bracknell, Crowthorne, Sandhurst and Warfield. Consultation responses had been received from Bracknell, Binfield and Warfield, who had agreed with the Statement Modifications.

The order was ready to be published in the local papers and a draft copy of the wording for the order was in the agenda papers. If there were any objections, this would be referred to the Secretary of State.

The Map would provide a legal record of the Borough's Public Rights of Way at a point in time and modifications would continue after. The GIS Team had worked on the maps and added grid blocks so that there would be fewer pages, making it easier to refer to. The maps would be on the Public Rights of Way website but the legal copy was at Time Square and the main library.

The link to the maps would be circulated to Forum members when available.

**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

## 6. **Thames Basin Heath and SANGS**

At Englemere Pond there were new site entrance signs installed off Swinley Road. Future works were planned for interpretation and waymarked trails. These had been sent out for tender. The aim was for the two trails to be named woodpecker and dragonfly. Three new interpretation boards were due to be established as well as a new viewing platform next to the pond.

At Shepherd Meadows bank restoration was due to go ahead on the Blackwater River. The timber work was in place and good weather was needed to make further progress with this work.

At the Cut Countryside Corridor (Larks Hill) the car park entrance had been widened and there was a new footpath section leading into site. A new cycle rack had been installed and six small site entrance signs.

## 7. **LCAF Annual Report**

A glossy LCAF 2011 Annual Report had been submitted to Natural England. The method by which LAFs reported to Natural England was under review. A new draft reporting template was being prepared by Natural England, which would include additional questions and follow a new reporting timescale that followed the financial year rather than calendar year. This would allow Natural England to better compare data between LAFs

The Parks and Countryside service had provided feedback on the new draft annual report template at the South East LAF officers update. A key point raised was that the template did not allow for LAFs to celebrate their successes. It was also suggested that Rights of Way should be included in the template. The new template would be used by LCAF to report for April 2011 to March 2012 and then April 2012 to March 2013.

The new template for reporting would be circulated to Forum members once finalised.  
**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

Forum members then should forward any comments about what can feature in the LCAF Annual Report to Rose or Graham. It was commented that the glossy annual report should remain on a calendar year.

**(Action: All)**

Statistics for monitoring of the BFC website would be sought to help ascertain as to whether demand for reading the LCAF glossy annual report was enough to justify production continuing.

**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

## 8. **Site Visits**

A joint Biodiversity Forum and LCAF visit to Crowthorne Woods was undertaken on Tuesday 3 July 2012, which was featured in the local papers. Nick Hazlitt from the Forestry Commission had given a talk about the aftermath of the forest fires. Of the 170 hectares of plantation, the fire had affected 56% with 30 hectares of plantation lost. Nick had given an overview of how forestry was adapting to wildfire and climate change and how land management could benefit biodiversity.

A report of the visit was included in the agenda papers. Conditions had been ideal for a forest fire with low rainfall, unusually high temperatures for the time of year and flammable material in the forest. Fire crews from ten counties had attended the fire. To prevent loss of life or damage to property, the decision was made to contain the fire in Crowthorne Woods, thereby sacrificing it in many places.

Rotational forestry would possibly be implemented which would benefit the wildlife as well. Rhododendron and bracken spraying would be undertaken. There would be new water areas and a network of ponds to help reduce fire risk and benefit wildlife such as dragonflies. Much effort had been undertaken by volunteers to help restore the affected areas of forest and these areas were gradually improving. The fire was in Crowthorne Woods and not Swinley Forest as had been reported. The level of regeneration in Crowthorne Woods had been impressive and it was suggested that this could be used as a future case study.

Ideas for future site visits included:

- Queenswood; seeing the harvest in progress

- Crown Estate; £250,000 would be invested in bike trails here and Forum members may be interested to see how the trails would be constructed
- Jennett's Park; tree planting and creation of new footpaths
- Shepherd Meadows; bank restoration, a possible site visit in Spring 2013
- South Hill Park; new waymark trails
- Jealott's Hill Farm; Forum members were invited to visit the farm

John Deakin would be contacted regarding the possibility of a Crown Estate visit.

**(Action: Rose Wicks)**

## 9. Reports from Officers

**Rose Wicks** reported that the Red, White and Blue photo competition which aimed to celebrate London 2012 and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee had closed for entries on Friday 28 September 2012. Ninety diverse photographic entries had been received, which would be judged in the next couple of months. The shortlisted entries would be exhibited at the Community Gallery at South Hill Park between 9 February and 7 April 2013.

The Parish and Town Councils in the borough, the public and the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel had been consulted on the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy. Objectives of the strategy fell under the headings of provision, maintenance, use and enjoyment. The consultation had finished and a decision was due on this on 12 October 2012.

A Walking and Outdoor Festival was held on 29 September 2012 to celebrate and promote the borough's public rights of way. Activities included walking and leisure cycling from Frost Folly and horse-riding from Cruchfield Manor Farm. There were different walks to suit all abilities: advanced, intermediate and easy access. There was a good turn out of people at the event and positive feedback. People had expressed an interest in participating in more outdoor activities and volunteering. Smaller sessions may be held in future, but there was a logistical difficulty in holding a big event like this on a regular basis.

**Graham Pockett** reported that there was a temporary footpath diversion in place for Crowthorne Restricted Byway 12. This was to allow contractors (on behalf of Scottish and Southern Energy) to install a 33kV underground electrical cable to supply Crowthorne Substation via the Devils Highway Bridleway. The diversion had been negotiated with the Forestry Commission. The order had come into force on 1 October 2012 and once the work had finished the order would cease to apply. This was open access land and a new circular route would be created with long term benefits.

A footpath creation agreement had been drafted for signing regarding a proposed new footpath to Sunninghill Road for The Crown Estate. The path would run from the eastern end of Winkfield Footpath 15 at Sunninghill Park to Sunninghill Road opposite Ascot Gate, Windsor Great Park.

There had been applications for modification orders in relation to three footpaths in the borough. There was an application to remove Sandhurst Footpath 15 from the Definitive Map and Statement but after extensive consultation and research the decision was taken to decline the application. An appeal by the applicant to the Secretary of State was refused.

There were ongoing issues with obstructions to Sandhurst Footpath 15 and misleading signage. The western end of the footpath at Branksome Hill Road had

been obstructed by a door and a scaffold tower, and the eastern end at College Road has been blocked with a wheelbarrow.

Under Section 143 of the Highways Act 1980, Bracknell Forest Council as the authority served notice to the resident of 26 Branksome Hill to secure the removal of an obstruction from Sandhurst Footpath 15, between Branksome Hill Road and College Road, College Town, Sandhurst. The notice stated that the obstructions should be removed from the Right of Way within seven days of the date of the notice (11th September 2012). In accordance with Highways Act 1980 section 143 (2)(3), if the obstructions have not been removed within one month of the date of this notice, the local authority may remove the obstruction(s) and recover the expenses reasonably incurred in so doing from the person having control or possession of the structures causing the obstruction(s).

The obstructions had been subsequently removed but the signage was still an issue as it was illegal to display misleading signs in relation to Public Rights of Way under section 57 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. There had been comments regarding the condition of the surface of the footpath. Vegetation management which had been delayed due to the obstruction had now been completed.

Two applications were received from the Open Spaces Society in relation to defining the widths of Sandhurst Footpath 21 and Crowthorne Footpath 8. The decision was to decline the application to modify the Definitive Statement by adding the claimed widths between 7.5 feet and 8.8 feet. It was considered appropriate that a width be stated and to add the alternative modification of 2.44 metres or 8 feet. The 1951 Parish Survey had been used as it provided a record of the width at the time of the first Definitive Map for East Berkshire. An appeal by the applicant to the Secretary of State was refused; the Inspector agreed with the council decision.

The number of Green Flag Awards being received for areas in Bracknell was increasing year on year. Awards had been received for Lily Hill Park, Pope's Meadow and Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park (jointly with Sandhurst Town Council). Other sites to receive awards included Jock's Lane Recreation Ground (Bracknell Town Council), Carnation Hall and Lock's Ride (Winkfield Parish Council). South Hill Park would be entered next year, and community groups and private landowners could also enter.

It was queried how to find out how green a borough was. Further information would be sought regarding this.

**(Action: Graham Pockett)**

Bracknell in Bloom had achieved a gold award again in the small city category for the Thames and Chiltern Region, Britain in Bloom. Bracknell had the highest percentage of successes of any other local authority in the Thames and Chiltern area. Bracknell won the Small City category and also won the Regional Award for Best Roadsides and Roundabouts. Bracknell was nominated to represent Thames and Chilterns in the Britain in Bloom 2013 National Finals.

#### 10. **Reports from Members round the table**

**Sharon Holt** reported that there was a new code of conduct on the British Horse Society (BHS) website about how cyclists should safely pass horse riders. Sharon had a link to a two minute video put together by the Forestry Commission Wales in association with the British Horse Society. Rose Wicks had liaised with Phillip Burke, Travel Plan Co-ordinator about whether it was appropriate to link to the video from

the Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) website. The link had been added to the horse page on the BFC website. Forum Members could contact Rose if they wished to see the video.

The Forestry Report included information regarding informal access to all woods and forests to all non-motorised modes of transport. Sharon queried why riders had to pay for access.

The Walking and Outdoor Festival went well; people enjoyed the event and queried whether it would take place again in the future. Rose Wicks thanked Sharon for all her work with the event, and thanked Mike Abbott for his help. The Horse Riding leaflet by BFC would be updated.

**Mike Abbott** reported that the Ramblers in South East Berkshire had obtained five kissing gates and these had been erected on Ambarrow Lane and Three Castles Path with help from volunteers. Mike thanked Hugh Fitzwilliams for the supervision and volunteer team on behalf of the South East Berkshire Ramblers. There was an aim for there to be plaques in future acknowledging the funding by South East Berkshire Ramblers and the help and support provided by the volunteers.

**Peter Radband** reported that where the Devil's Highway passed under Foresters Way the area became badly flooded when there was heavy rain. Rose reported that this was a public right of way and the flooding was in relation to drainage of the highway. There was a Highway Works Programme and a dredger was used to clear the drainage problem, which was a lengthy process. It was suggested that this process needed to be undertaken every two to three years rather than every five years or longer. Issues in relation to public rights of way could be reported directly to the rights of way e-mail drop account [rightsofway@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:rightsofway@bracknell-forest.gov.uk).

Peter raised an objection to the new car parking charges at The Look Out which some thought restricted access to the countryside. It was reported that the Forum was consulted and that there was no end date for the car park charging contract; the contract would be reviewed every six months and then yearly. Attendance figures were being monitored and the impact on other nearby parking areas was being checked and results recorded. It was queried why people were being charged for parking at The Look Out. This would be investigated further.

**(Action: Graham Pockett/ Rose Wicks)**

11. **Public Question Time**

Observer Jenny Young of Tally Ho Stables was appreciative of being invited to the meeting and found it useful to hear about countryside issues. Jenny would consider observing future meetings of the Forum.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 12 March 2013, 7pm, Function Room, 5th Floor, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell.

**CHAIRMAN**

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