

Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum



Annual Report 2010

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) placed a duty on Bracknell Forest Council to establish and maintain a 'Local Access Forum'. The Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum is an independent advisory body that aims to improve recreational access to the local countryside for all users, whilst enabling landowners and managers to make the best of their land. Bracknell Forest Council provides officer support to the Forum as well as training and liaison with other neighbouring Forums and organisations.



This document provides a background to the work of the Bracknell Forest Local Access Forum, briefly setting out some of its achievements. More details can be found on the Council's website at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/LCAF.

A look back at the year...

1. Meetings and site visits

Two meetings lasting approximately 2 hours took place:

23rd March Attended by 8 Statutory Board Members, 5 officers/others and 2 observers.

28th September Attended by 8 Statutory Board Members, 6 officers/others and 2 observers.

In addition to the meetings there were 3 site visits. The first was an evening walk on the 25th May with Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Local Access Forum to look at the byways, bridleway and footpaths along the borough's boundary. The second took place on 9th Oct and was an introduction by John Deakin, Chief Forester to the Crown Estate, to the Cranbourne Chase area. The last site visit was another cross-boundary walk in conjunction with RBWM to trial part of the proposed easy going route in Great Windsor Forest.

For more details about the cross boundary walks see section 4. For a description of the Crown Estate walk see section 5.

2. Election of a new Chairman at September meeting

Diana Pidgeon OBE advised Forum Members that she would be stepping down as Chairman of the Forum. Diana had been involved with parks and countryside work since 1984 and had been Chairman of the Local Countryside Access Forum in Bracknell Forest for seven years. Diana thanked everyone who had contributed over the years.

It was resolved that:

1. Michael Abbott be elected as Chairman of the Forum
2. Mike Gates be re-elected as Vice-Chairman of the Forum

For a more detailed description about Forum membership see section 13.

3. National and regional LCAF work

LAF views had been sought from Duncan Graham, Chairman of the England Access Forum, and Rob Cooke, Director of Environment Advice and Analysis, on Natural England and the England Access Forum's future working arrangements. Feedback had been requested by 30 September 2010. Forum members discussed whether Natural England should have a statutory remit to consult with Government and non-governmental bodies. Natural England's government funding originated from DEFRA which was currently in the process of revising its status after the new coalition government was elected. LAF's would likely not be directly affected by this. Feedback would be gathered at a national and regional level. Forum members queried whether government funding was essential to the running of the England Access Forum (EAF).

Forum members decided that the two points they would like to feedback on were logical structure from local through regional to national representation and secure funding. Draft wording for the feedback was circulated to Forum Members for agreement and then forwarded to Natural England by 30 September 2010.

There have been examples of good communications and cross-boundary cooperation between the neighbouring Berkshire Local Access Forums. Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum, which covers Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham, appoints

an observer to the Bracknell Forest LCAF meetings and there are proposals for Bracknell to do the same. Initial contact has been made with all neighbouring LAFs and members are informed about meeting dates, in case they would like to attend.

4. LAF cross boundary working

Neighbouring LAFs meet up for cross-boundary network walk.

“On 25th May, the Local Access Forums of Bracknell Forest Council and The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead met up for an evening walk to look at byways, bridleway and footpaths along the borough’s boundary.

The initiative had been discussed by both forums last year after Graham Pockett of Bracknell Forest Council suggested it, and was put on the agenda for this year once the evenings were light enough. Officers from the two authorities liaised about the date, meeting point, route and suggested topics for discussion, and a map was prepared and circulated to all members and officers.

On the northern boundary of Bracknell Forest and the southern boundary of Windsor & Maidenhead there are a number of bridlepaths, byways and footpaths that cross the boundary. One byway runs along the boundary, and this is an important area for horse riders with good connections to an extensive network away from trafficked roads.

Among the topics discussed at various points along the walk were a new timber surfacing material that Windsor and Maidenhead intend to trial on a section of bridlepath; whether there should be signage on rights of way when they cross from one authority area into another; arrangements for maintaining paths on boundaries; how a new bridlepath was created using a combination of highway verge and private land; naming of lanes with signs and comparisons in the way the two Forums operate.

We agreed that Bracknell Forest would also monitor the surface material trial, and we now intend to install waymarker discs with clear identification of which authority is responsible for the right of way.

It was a great opportunity for officers and members from two boroughs to meet up and find out about each other, and will help to cement working arrangements in the future. One member of the Bracknell Forest Forum lived close to the route and generously provided liquid refreshments at the end of the walk.

The weather was perfect, and all agreed it was a very worthwhile and enjoyable evening. The intention is that this cross-boundary type event should be repeated with other neighbouring Local Access Forums, and this also runs parallel to the appointing of observers to attend other LAF meetings, which was initiated by Mid & West Berkshire LAF. Increasing liaison can only strengthen the regional representation and lead to improved networks and more co-operation over mutual maintenance arrangements and signage, to the benefit of all users of the rights of way network.”

Graham Pockett
Parks and Countryside Development Officer
Bracknell Forest Council

01344 354107
graham.pockett@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Great Windsor Park easy going route

Bracknell Forest LCAF members and a Bracknell Forest Council Officer attended the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Great Windsor Park walk back in October. The purpose of the walk was to trial part of the proposed Easy Going Route, which it is hoped will encourage less able users to visit the park and take advantage of the excellent recreation facility that is on offer for free to the public.



Great Windsor Park walk, 18th October 2010

5. Other site visits

Crown Estate visit

The Local Access Forum had an excellent site visit to Crown Estate land at Cranbourne Chase on the 9th October, which was led by Chief Forester to the Crown Estate, John Deakin. The walk was attended by two BFC officers and two LAF members.



Crown Estate walk, 9th October 2010

6. Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) mid-term review

Bracknell Forest Council is in the process of conducting a mid-term review of its ROWIP to review performance against actions and targets. There is a Government shift to integrate ROWIPs and LTPs in order to help deliver a more streamlined and integrated approach to sustainable transport in rural and urban areas. There will be close integration of the ROWIP into the LTP3 which is currently at consultation phase. The LTP3 will follow guidance which recognises the role of active travel solutions such as walking and cycling by looking at initiatives for school runs, the cycle network and a 'walking bus' for children going to and from school. The integration of the two plans should also open up further opportunities for funding rights of way improvements where the two plans share common aims. It does not mean that ROWIPs will disappear, only that the two documents will be very closely linked.

Once a draft of the mid-term review ROWIP has been prepared by early 2011, BF LCAF members will be contacted for their comments/feedback. Be Heard members will be included in this *consultation*, to gauge whether issues concerning accessibility have been appropriately address in the review.

Work on the new *Definitive Map and Statement* is still in progress. The original plan had been produced by BAPTIE but for the first time the new Definitive Map will be produced internally by the Parks and Countryside and GIS mapping teams. The aim is to complete work on the map by the end of 2011. Work will depend on the highway authority approach. Bracknell Forest is a relatively small unitary authority with a proportionate rights of way network.

The Parks and Countryside service continues to deal with public enquiries about rights of way, investigating new applications for modification orders, and setting up temporary diversions for improvements being carried out to paths and access. A *register of modification order applications* has now been created and is available via the public website.

7. Thames Basin Heath SPA

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) are a group of public open spaces designated to attract more visitors and provide an alternative to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The following work was completed in 2010:

Engelmere pond: Some new entrance signs have been installed to improvement the site entrance.

Longhill Park: New paths, steps and a length of boardwalk have been constructed to create a circular walk and also to improve linear links with Lily Hill Park. New finger post signs have been ordered and are due to be installed on site. These feature larger lettering than for traditional fingerposts, to improve legibility from a distance, and also for those with impaired sight. This follows feedback from BeHeard members while carrying out an inclusive design audit at Westmorland Park.

8. Marketing and interpretation

New visitor information boards have been installed by key access points at *Caesar's Camp* in early 2010, in addition to points of particular archaeological interest. Grant funding for the work was secured from Natural England to improve access and visitor information at the Iron Age Scheduled Ancient Monument.



Rights of Way Ranger Hugh Fitzwilliam standing next to one of the new interpretation boards

New interpretation has been designed and is due to be installed at Shepherd Meadows, which will accompany new information boards at Sandhurst Memorial Park. Sandhurst Town Council and Bracknell Forest Council have been working in partnership to improve signage across the jointly managed Green Flag Award winning sites.

The *leaflets* 'Parks and Countryside Sites' and 'Pope's Meadow' have been updated and reprinted. Large quantities of these have been distributed to all Bracknell libraries and the Look Out Discovery centre. The Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park site leaflet is in the process of being redesigned in time for the 2011 Management Plan to be submitted with the Green Flag entry.



Discover ...
Shepherd
Meadows and
Sandhurst
Memorial Park



A countryside site and park in Sandhurst



Discover ...
Pope's Meadow



A countryside park in Birfield,
Bracknell Forest.



Discover
The parks
and countryside
of Bracknell
Forest



Your guide to 'getting out and about' in some of the most picturesque landscapes within Bracknell Forest

9. Parks Photo Competition

The annual photographic competition proved as popular as ever, receiving more than 100 entries from budding amateur photographers. The theme of the 2010 competition was *'Biodiversity in Bracknell Forest'* to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity. There were some impressive photos which will provide a valuable resource for future use on the website, in leaflets, on posters and in other publications. A panel of six judges, which included an accredited photographic competition judge from Bracknell Camera Club and a biodiversity officer to fit in with the theme of the competition, used a revised scoring method to select the best entries. These were then shortlisted to 17, from which the winning image was selected, along with 2 runners-up and several photographs that were highly commended.

The Parks Photo Competition winners, runners up, and an extended selection of photographs will be exhibited at the Community Gallery, South Hill Park between 5th February and 3rd April 2011.

10. Promoting social inclusion and accessibility

Be-Heard: The Parks and Countryside service continued their partnership working with Be-Heard - a member-led group of learning disabled adults that promotes self-advocacy and peer advocacy to enrich the lives of its members. To find out more about this charity visit their website: <http://www.be-heard.co.uk/>

Be-heard were consulted on the designs for the new signs due to be installed at Shepherd Meadows, to ensure they were designed with accessibility in mind.



BFC Parks & Countryside Project Officer attending a Be-Heard meeting.

Disabled Go: The Council and its partners have been working with DisabledGo, a national charity, to produce an online access guide covering 500 venues across the Borough to help inform and empower people with disabilities. The venues will not only include Council buildings but also shops, hotels, restaurants and cafes.

<http://www.disabledgo.com/>

11. Awards

Green Flag – Bracknell Forest was awarded 3 Green Flags for Pope’s Meadow, Lily Hill Park and the joint partnership entry with Sandhurst Town Council for Sandhurst Memorial Park and Shepherd Meadows. New applications for these 3 sites will be submitted in late January 2011.



Britain in Bloom – Bracknell was named winner of the ‘small city’ class receiving gold in the RHS Thames and Chilterns in bloom group and best portfolio in the region for all city classes. Bracknell also received the prestigious regional award for best floral input and Ranelagh School received a commendation in the Mark Mattock Schools Challenge Cup for horticultural and environmental achievement.



Scott Terrace, entry for front Garden Category

12. Other projects

Priory Field: Pitch reinstatement works have been completed. The field has been marked up with 1 senior and 2 junior pitches this season and goals have been put up for the senior pitch. The pitches are now in use by Whitegrove FC and initial feedback is good. Westmorland Park has been marked up with 1 senior and 2 junior pitches - last year there were 5 junior pitches. This means that the total number of games being played at Westmorland has been reduced which should help reduce some of the issues re. demand for car parking.

Resurfacing work to Sandhurst FP4: The Ward Members have identified up to £20,000 funding for surface improvements to *Sandhurst Footpath 4*. Ringway have been asked to provide a quotation for the works, which will go ahead as soon as practicable.

Queen Anne Gully: Work was completed to restore this historic footpath and ride which was established in 1708 so that an ageing Queen Anne could follow the hunt in her carriage.

The gully which runs from Nine Mile Ride to Caesar's Camp was identified as having subsiding banks and therefore in need of repair to make it safe for public use.

Working jointly with the Crown Estate, Bracknell Forest Council secured grant funding from Natural England to replace the rotting timber with locally sourced timber (Cedars) from the Crown Estate.

Other visitor access improvements include 4 new interpretation boards/lecterns placed around the site.

Photographs of the finished project work were presented at the Local Countryside Access Forum meeting where they were met with approval from members.



Visitor access improvement at Queen Anne Gully.

Improvement works to PROW: Bracknell Forest Council continues to actively review and manage the boroughs public footpaths, byways, restricted byways and bridleways. This doesn't go unnoticed by users:

"Once again, Bracknell Forest Council Access Department have exceeded my expectations regarding the surfaces of my local bridlepaths. They actively review and fix and boggy surfaces very quickly and I sometimes barely have time to even report a problem. When I do have to report the odd fallen tree or overgrown vegetation, they are quickly on the scene, fixing the problem. Well done particularly to Hugh Fitzwilliams as I often see him out surveying his patch"

Sharon Holt, local horse rider and Bracknell Forest LCAF member.

13. Forum membership

Membership of the forum is aimed at giving a balance to differing interests and currently represents a mix of countryside managers, users and other interests. There are currently 11 members on the forum who meet to discuss local access projects and help or advise with improvements.

Members Interest List

Chair:

- **Mr Michael Abbott** is Footpath Secretary for SE Berks Ramblers Association. He represents countryside users on the forum and has a particular interest in health and transport.

Vice-Chair:

- **Mr Mike Gates** is a founder member of the Nuptown Area Preservation Society and sits on the Warfield Parish Council planning committee. He has lived in rural Nuptown for over 20 years and represents countryside users and other interests on the forum.
- **Mr David Bertie** is chairman of the Berkshire Committee of the CLA and sits on the Bracknell Forest Countryside and Leisure Committee. He represents a landowning interest on the Local Access Forum.
- **Councillor Michael Brossard** is a Local Borough Councillor. He sits on both the Licensing and Safety and Planning and Highways Committee and is part of the licensing panel. Cllr Brossard is also a representative for the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.
- **Mr Joe Dodson** is a regular cyclist and keen walker, being a member of the CTC (formerly Cyclists' Touring Club) and the Austrian Alpine Club. In addition to enjoying the countryside for leisure, he would like to explore improving routes for enjoyable commuting.
- **Mrs Sharon Holt** as a local horse rider she represents horse owners and riders in Binfield, Warfield and Winkfield areas on the forum.
- **Mr Innes McEwen** has been Farm Manager at Syngenta Ltd since September 2006 and represents a landowning interest on the forum. Syngenta Ltd is a member of NFU and FWAG.
- **Mr Richard Mosses** represents countryside users on the forum and is an active member of the SE Berks Ramblers Association. He is also a member of the National Trust, Woodlands Trust and RSPB.
- **Mr Peter Radband** is a local teacher and the treasurer of the Berks on Bikes Mountain Bike Club and a member of the Hampshire and Berkshire Rover Owners Club. He represents countryside users on the forum.
- **Mr John Deakin** is the Chief Forester for the Crown Estate at Windsor and joins the forum to represent a major landowner within the Borough. Their policy is to encourage access into their forests for a wide range of uses, but try to balance this against its status as SSSI and SPA.
- **Miss Caroline Tomalin** is a freelance journalist for Horse and Hound online and, as a horse owner and rider and walker, represents countryside users.

Changes to membership

Mrs Diana Pidgeon OBE has stepped down as chairman of the forum and will play a reduced part in LCAF.