

**LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
23 MARCH 2010
7.00 - 8.45 PM**



Present:

Statutory Board Members:

Mr Mike Gates (Chairman)
Mr Michael Abbott
Councillor Michael Brossard
Mr Joe Dodson
Sharon Holt
Mr Richard Mosses
Mr Peter Radband
Mr Derick Stickler

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, Parks & Countryside Manager

Observers:

Mrs D M Smith, Mid & West Berkshire LAF
John Warren, Be Heard

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Mrs Diana Pidgeon OBE
Mr Innes McEwen

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 29 September 2009 were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Minute 6, Thames Basin Heath SPA

The first paragraph should read 'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) were a group of exciting open spaces', rather than 'exiting open spaces'.

The third paragraph should read the 'Cut Countryside Corridor route formed a linear walk', rather than 'a circular walk'.

Minute 11, Reports from Members round the Table

'Michael Abbott reported that a sign had been posted at Englemere Pond', rather than 'Mike Gates'.

Under Sharon Holt's report, motor bikes and mopeds had been 'sighted' in the woods, rather than 'sited'.

Matters Arising

The high standing woods hill area was still on offer as a site visit.

Bracknell Forest Council had undertaken successful prosecutions regarding flytipping in the area. Agencies were working closely together to tackle the issue. Cabbage Hill Lane was a problem area for flytipping. In areas where cameras were located, it was suggested that a sign could be erected to advise people they were being watched. It was queried who's responsibility it was for removing flytipping. Once reported Bracknell Forest Council responded quickly to clear flytipping but the trend for flytipping was down overall in the area. It was reported that people could make an appointment to visit Longshot Lane Recycling Centre with commercial waste as a householder. Waste disposal costs escalated by approximately £8 per ton per year.

17. **Staffing, Membership and Recruitment**

Derick Stickler would be retiring from the Crown Estate and also from the Forum, but would continue to live on the estate. Derick's successor would start on 27 May 2010 and may be happy to take Derick's place on the Forum. There would be a landowner vacancy on the Forum until volunteers were found, although a representative from the Crown Estate would be welcomed. This vacancy would possibly be advertised and applicants for the vacancy would need to complete an application form.

Sally Coulson, Parks and Countryside Projects Officer, had left the Council in January to work for Bournemouth Borough Council. Sally's position was being advertised and the closing date for applications was 6 April 2010. The Forum expressed their appreciation and best wishes to Sally for the future.

Councillor Raymond Simonds, who was a member of the Forum, had passed away in December 2009. A replacement would likely be nominated at the Annual Council meeting in May 2010.

Mrs Diane Smith was a newly appointed observer to the Forum from Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum, which covered Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. Mrs Smith was present to observe best practice. It was suggested that a member of the Bracknell Local Countryside Access Forum could approach Mid and West Berkshire, or another bordering authority's Local Access Forum such as Windsor and Maidenhead, regarding observing their meetings.

A list of bordering local authorities' Local Access Forum dates would be gathered for the next meeting of the Forum in September.

(Action: Graham Pockett/Richard Walton)

Mrs Diana Pidgeon, not present at the meeting, had expressed an interest to stand down as Chairman. Forum Members were requested to think about nominating a Forum Member for the role of Chairman at the next meeting of the Forum in September. If there was more than one nomination for the role of Chairman, then a vote would be undertaken. Forum Members should contact Graham Pockett on graham.pockett@bracknell-forest.gov.uk or 01344 354107 if they would like to nominate a fellow member or were interested in taking on the role.

(Action: All)

18. Local Transport Plan 3

A Local Transport Plan 3 newsletter was circulated to Forum Members. There was a statutory link between the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and the Local Transport Plan (LTP).

The LTP encouraged people to use non-car based forms of transport and Forum Members were encouraged to have an active role in the LTP process. The Planning and Transport Department at the Council would send out a feedback questionnaire on the LTP and would welcome feedback from Forum Members.

(Action: All)

The LTP3 would need to be in place by April 2011. LTP's would usually need to be replaced every five years but the LTP3 would stand for a longer period until 2026 to stand alongside regional guidance. The LTP had previously been a bidding document but the LTP3 would be a more strategic document. Matt Lunn, Planning Assistant, would be co-ordinating work on the LTP3 and would circulate the feedback questionnaire to Forum Members regarding the consultation.

19. Playbuilder

Playbuilder projects were being undertaken in Bracknell Forest, many on Town and Parish sites and throughout different areas of the Borough such as in Ascot, Binfield and Sandhurst. The projects would need to be completed by the end of March 2010, but it was possible that the national deadline may be extended due to weather conditions restricting work being undertaken. Some photos of the sites had been taken. New equipment was being installed and replacing older equipment on the sites.

The new or refurbished play areas were aimed at children aged 8-13 years. The £1million government initiative would promote 22 new or existing play areas within the Borough over a two year period and was closely monitored by Play England. The initiative was commissioned by the treasury and funded by the Children's Plan, to help improve and encourage active lifestyles.

Artificial stone walls were being developed at the Winscombe site. The government had realised the social implications of being too risk adverse and were moving away from this at policy level. One contractor had been employed to refurbish or create five of the eleven sites being focused on in Year 1 of the initiative. The time scale had been a problem but they were catching up.

20. National and Regional LCAF Work

Letters had been received in February from the England Access Forum (EAF) outlining problems with support and funding from Natural England for the EAF. At an EAF meeting on 8 March 2010 it was decided that the existing relationship with Natural England could not continue. Funding for the future was an issue and letters had been sent to the Minister Huw Irranca-Davies, Labour MP and Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Marine and Natural Environment), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, requesting help.

Duncan Graham CBE would be writing to LAF Chairmen setting out conclusions and suggestions, including the possibility of putting the EAF on a statutory basis and the government providing funding, such as from DEFRA, Department for Environment,

Food and Rural Affairs. Detailed letters could be e-mailed to Forum members on request.

Each authority needed to be involved in an Access Forum, and there were national, country and regional forums. It was queried whether the establishment of Access Forums originated from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and this would be investigated.

(Action: Graham Pockett)

21. Higher Level Stewardship and Signage

New funding was being used to rejuvenate areas of the Borough such as Shepherd Meadows. Funding of approximately £5,200 per annum for 10 years from 2010 would be used over an area of 29 Hectares. Shepherd Meadows was a relatively large area of Bracknell Forest but it made up 28% of flower rich grassland area in Berkshire as a whole.

The grey water management scheme had an impact on the meadows due to the loss of water to the area. The river was now deeper and straighter but the meadows were continually drying out. Ideas to keep the meadows wet would need to be considered.

A plan was in place to promote Shepherd Meadows and the memorial parks in the borough. Work would be undertaken on woodland coppice, headland management, replacing old notice boards and signage, and interpretation panels would be placed strategically around the Shepherd Meadows site. The boards were resilient but the edging was less durable and could pose a problem.

The Forum discussed the draft proposals for signage at Shepherd Meadows and the main points were:

- Reduce the amount of wording and have larger pictures.
- Information would need to be accessible to a range of people as many people did not read well and people with sight problems would likely appreciate different background colours.
- Possible dual signage for younger and older people.

The area of Shepherd Meadows in Hampshire, and now the area of the meadows in Wokingham, was owned by Bracknell Forest Council.

22. Site Visits

Forum Members suggested the following as possible future site visits:

- Crown Wood Estate – a site visit would take place at 10am on Saturday 25 September at High Standing Hill Gate, before the next LCAF meeting at the end of September. The previous site visit had been postponed due to the weather.
- Cross boundary site visit with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) would be arranged in May. It would be useful to meet with RBWM in an informal setting to discuss possible joint working regarding cross border work.

(Action: Graham Pockett)

- Playbuilder sites
- Sandhurst Memorial Park

A visit to the Playbuilder sites could be organised, similar to the Jennett's Park walk around, and could be combined with Sandhurst Memorial Park. Play Rangers were helping to tackle vandalism by young people through interactive play.

Any ideas for future site visits should be forwarded to Graham Pockett or Richard Walton.

23. Reports from Members round the Table

- **Sharon Holt** reported that flytipping problems were ongoing. Thames Water would remove large items of rubbish but not the smaller items and their manager would be contacted regarding this.

(Action: Hugh Fitzwilliams)

If a carriage driver wished to gain access to bridal pathways they would need to contact Graham Pockett or e-mail Rights.OfWay@bracknell-forest.gov.uk . A limited number of carriage drivers were given permission to access bridal pathways and were given keys. Landowner approval was required before bridal pathways could be used by carriage drivers.

- **David Putt** reported that Volunteers Day was on 16 June 2010 and Be Heard would be looking for worthwhile projects. David would forward the details onto the Forum. It would be useful to have photographers to help with the marketing. Graham Pockett would be invited to a meeting of the sub group of the Learning Disability Partnership of Health Group. There would be a range of activities in 2010 regarding promoting health. Forum Members were welcome to contribute. Graham Pockett would suggest ideas for projects at the meeting. BFC Rangers Kevin or Marie-Anne had worked with volunteers from Ravenswood and could be contacted regarding project ideas. Projects may include gardening, well-being and leisure, tennis tasters or football club.
- **Derick Stickler** reported that Warner Bros had been filming Harry Potter on the Crown Estate again. Natural England had given permission. Funding would be put back into restoring the SPA and work would start over the next few weeks. Plantation had been cut down and some land needed to be reforested but there would be no more filming in the forest in the foreseeable future. The forest was drier during the summer and there were fewer complaints. Concerns had been expressed regarding the condition of the tracks after the film crew had been in the forest, but Warner Bros had not left any litter. Soil would need to be put down and the tracks made up. South East Water had returned to undertake some work on the waterline. Completion had been put back by nine months and they would aim for water to be in the pipe by the end of May. The Caesar's Camp project was going ahead. Timber would go to the saw mill over the next few weeks. Work would begin on restoring Queen Anne Gulley in August and the public right of way would possibly be diverted via the car park at the top of the ridge
- **Joe Dodson** reported that the Winkfield footpath, which ran from Crouch Lane to Drift Road, was becoming waterlogged at the Crouch Lane end as the landowner had fenced it in. The footpath had been reinstated back onto the original line on the field and there was no easy solution to getting rid of the water. It was queried whether the hedging could be tied back onto the fence in this area and Joe would discuss this further with Hugh Fitzwilliams. It was felt that the squeeze stiles were unsightly and it was requested that they be removed. The stiles were only just within the legal limit and did not provide good access for less able people.
- **Michael Abbott** reported that Mr Geoff Paxton would undertake a three mile walk on Sunday 28 March at 10.30am starting from the legion car park and posters advertising the walk had been put up in Winkfield and Warfield Parishes.

- **Councillor Michael Brossard** reported that members could approach Neighbourhood Action Group Chairmen regarding issues of flytipping and street cleaning as this was a useful route to tackling problem areas. Councillor Brossard had undertaken a walk at Sandhurst Memorial Park with Linda Lunn of the Bracknell Forest Society. The Hawkswood Conservationists would bend the willow over to create fencing in the 40 yard area on Hitch Lane in Sandhurst. A hedge parallel to and at the other end of the river would be restored, coppiced and re-laid to generate a strong hedge.

24. **Any Other Business**

Robin Mosses had passed away on 10 March 2010. Robin had been deeply involved in countryside matters and his legacy would be invaluable to LCAF work. Robin's funeral would take place at 3pm on 9 April 2010 at the Easthampstead Crematorium.

25. **Public Question Time**

John Warren, an observer at the meeting, asked about the bird breeding habitat at Priory Field, as there was a lock on the gate which meant that people were unable to use the site.

The site had been bought by Bracknell Forest Council to use as sports pitches or to create sports facilities for housing in the area. Work had been undertaken during the 2006-07 financial year to lay sport turf quality grass but the construction had failed. The area was not safe enough to play on as the top to bottom layer had not bound and consequently there was a risk of injury. Contractors were on the site to strip the top layer and re-lay it. It was expected to be open next September. Priory Field was located in a traveller area, so it was important to keep the site secure.

Mr Warren queried if there had been any update on the possibility of a bus stop at the Look Out. There was no further update on this at present but the issue would be raised in the Local Transport Plan.

(Action: Graham Pockett/Richard Walton)

Mr Warren reported that there were dry valleys just south of the Look Out in Swinley Forest which were of geological interest and suggested that a site visit to this area may be of interest to the Forum. He had suggested that Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) should assess the site for Local Geological Site status (formerly RIGS). Interpretation boards would be erected in this area. Derick Stickler commented that the Crown Estate would be happy to talk to TVERC about this.

The RMA grounds would be open on Sunday 20 June. This provided an opportunity to view the countryside in this area which was normally not open to members of the public. Entry would be free and car parking would be available. Major Andy Stevens could be contacted if Forum Members wished to advertise this in their local area. The Crown Estate would need to be approached regarding this day. Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre had been designated to make decisions regarding protection of the area. Some of the area was protected as SPA.

Swinley Forest was protected for birds at present, but it did not have a geological designation.

Mrs Diane Smith, an observer from Mid and West Berkshire LAF, commented that she had not looked at the Playbuilder sites. At Mid and West Berkshire LAF

discussions were held regarding footpath variations, such as the Thames Paths, the legalities of paths opened and access.

Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) was a small unitary authority and there were less issues surrounding rights of way. In the BFC area, rights of way were concentrated in the northern area of the borough, the amount of work related to public enquiries, modifications to paths and bridleways, and the impact of new housing sites varied considerably.

26. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 28 September 2010, 7pm, Function Room, 5th Floor, Easthampstead House.

CHAIRMAN

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