

LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM
25 SEPTEMBER 2007
(7.00 - 8.50 pm)

Present: **Statutory Board Members:**
Mr David Bertie
Mrs Celia Blay
Councillor Michael Brossard
Mr Joe Dodson
Mr Mike Gates
Miss Anne Haydon
Mr Richard Mosses
Mrs Diana Pidgeon OBE
Mr Peter Radband
Councillor Raymond Simonds
Mr Derick Stickler
Mr Stuart Tarrant

In attendance/ Observers:

Sally Coulson, Parks & Countryside Projects Officer, BFBC
Marlies Fell, Biodiversity Officer, BFBC
Hugh Fitzwilliams, Rights of Way Ranger, BFBC
Sue Hills, Democratic Services Officer, BFBC
Melissa Read, Environmental Policy Officer, BFBC
Richard Walton, Parks & Countryside Manager, BFBC

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr Innes McEwen
Miss Caroline Tomalin

1. Welcome

Diana Pidgeon welcomed all members to the meeting, including Councillors Brossard and Simonds, Bracknell Forest Borough Council's newly appointed representatives.

The Forum noted that Councillor Iain McCracken hoped to attend future meetings as an observer.

2. Apologies

None received.

3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 27 March 2007 were approved as a correct record.

Matters arising –

Minute 102a. Flooding/Sewerage Issues at the Cut

The Forum noted that this was a significant issue. There had been a blockage at the local pump house which resulted in a series of manholes discharging into the Cut during flash floods. This could impact on building in the West End area. Stuart Tarrant was asked to monitor the situation.

4. **Future of the Forum**

4.1 **Site Visits**

Informal site visit review

The Forum agreed that the first site visit around the Crown Estate had been useful and informative. The Forum was keen to continue these informal onsite meetings throughout the year.

Unfortunately the site visit scheduled for September, a historical guided walk with Celia Blay, was cancelled as a precautionary measure due to the foot and mouth outbreak and will be re-scheduled early in 2008.

Suggestions for future site visits –

- South of Bracknell – along the Blackwater Valley via Shepherd Meadows and Wildmoor Heath. This would provide an opportunity to look at issues relating to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. It was suggested that this walk would take place on a Saturday morning due to the nights drawing in. 19 and 26 January were potential dates presented to the Forum. Sally Coulson to write to forum members in due course.
- A Bluebell Walk north of Warfield Parish, one afternoon in late March/early April. Mike Gates offered to provide afternoon tea. Sally Coulson would contact members with potential dates.

(ACTION - Sally Coulson)

Ideas for site visits should be sent to Sally Coulson.

4.2 **Membership**

The Forum agreed to look into recruiting new Forum members, and particularly to encourage new members with an interest in disabled access. Various ways of reaching potential new members were suggested –

- A returnable slip on the back of the annual report
- Advertisement in local and parish newspapers
- Information to be included in the events programme
- Leaflets/ posters/ flyers at the Look Out and in libraries and GP surgeries
- Word of mouth

The Forum agreed that Anne Haydon should remain a member, despite no longer being a Council representative.

Sally Coulson reminded members that they should contact her if they needed a copy of the LAF terms of reference.

5. **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA)**

Melissa Read gave an informative presentation on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). The largest proportion of the SPA falls within Bracknell Forest, mainly Crown Estate to the south of the borough.

Within the Local Development Framework core strategy document is policy CS14 which related to the SPA. There is also an evidence document. Both had been the subject of extensive consultation and were awaiting the decision of the inspector.

If houses are to be built, potential harm to the wildlife has to be mitigated. Bracknell Forest needs to ensure the SPA is protected whilst still meeting housing need. Measures taken include –

- The provision of alternative open space, new open space and enhancement of existing open space.
- The formulation of visitor access management.
- A 400 metre exclusion zone around the SPA.
- Education strategy raising awareness.
- No loss of supporting habitats
- Restriction of cat ownership in areas very near the SPA.

Such measures are to be funded from S106 payments made by developers.

Richard Walton updated on prioritisation of SANGS (Sites of Alternative Natural Green Space) to be improved –

- Horseshoe Lakes – mini plan had been approved by Natural England. Contractors were currently on site implementing initial access management improvements.
- Longhill Park – Mini plan had been produced.
- Englemere Pond – work had commenced liaising with the Crown Estate.
- Silver Green/Wick Hill area – draft plan by early winter.
- Ambarrow Court – working with the National Trust, draft plan to be ready by the end of December.
- Larks Hill, Garth Meadows and neighbouring copses – draft plan by end of April 2008.
- Shepherd Meadows - draft plan by end of April 2008.

The Forum noted that

- SPA mitigation space was in addition to green space already required on new developments.
- Cross boundary co-operation needed to be developed as all authorities were currently working independently on their own areas.

The web link to view the documents –

<http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/environment/env-planning-and-development/env-planning-guidance/env-thames-basin-heaths-spa/env-spa-technical-background.htm>

6. **Regional LAF Work**

6.1 **Dog Control Orders**

The Forum noted the briefing paper, circulated with the agenda. Dog Control Orders could be made by all Parish, Town, District and Unitary Councils on open land to which the public were entitled or permitted to have access. Although the powers had been provided, no additional funding was forthcoming. Investigations were currently being undertaken to ascertain if the new powers could be implemented alongside the current duties of the Dog Warden. Rangers had received initial training on the use of fixed penalty notices.

There was discussion of the 'stick and flick policy' where people were encouraged to toss dog faeces into the undergrowth so that footpaths were not fouled. Bracknell Forest provides bins and encourages dog owners to 'bag and bin'.

The briefing paper highlighted the following issues:-

- Orders could impose a variety of restrictions across the county. How could we keep an overview of such orders? Should our advice to the public regarding dogs on rights of ways be amended?
- How could we input to the process? Should we ask Parish Councils and District Councils to consult us? Could we provide guidance on when we thought an order was justifiable?
- Should we ask the Secretary of State to exempt Rights of Way from more or all of the types of order?

6.2 **NE Funding for LAF Training**

The Forum noted that Natural England had funding for LAF training and that some future workshops would take place in the south east area. Most of the current training events were too far away for members to attend.

6.3 **South East LAF Newsletter**

The Spring 2007 newsletter was circulated. The Autumn edition is due to be published early in November. The newsletter features a brief outline of all SE LAFs' achievements over the past few months. Any items that members wished to write on behalf of the Bracknell Forest LAF should be sent to Sally Coulson by 26 October.

6.4 **Regional Support for LAFs and Role of the National Forum**

An update from Natural England was currently awaited.

7. **Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)**

7.1 **Winkfield Bridleway Creation**

The Forum had previously agreed that initially a 'dead end' bridleway would be created and BFBC would continue to pursue identifying and establishing a connection to the wider access network onto either Crouch Road or House Lane

(ACTION – Sally Coulson).

7.2 **Priory Fields Bridleway**

This could potentially be linked to the role of Larks Hill as a SANG. A cost allowance for the work to the bridleway would be included within the mini plan (April 2008). It would not be feasible to actively promote as a route across the highway, although it would be adjacent to permissive bridle access onto Larks Hill.

7.3 **Improvements to Winkfield 5**

This footpath was very muddy after heavy rainfall. Investigations were being made to see what drainage improvements could be made.

7.4 **Works on Hawthorn Lane**

The Forum noted slides showing a new culvert and ditches for excess water. The verges had been recovered and surface improvements made to the path.

7.5 **Access**

A £25000 Access Management Grant bid had been previously made to the Countryside Agency, but this grant scheme had ceased. The Council had now put in an application to Natural England for £25000 for access management and habitat improvement at Wildmoor, an addition to the current funding for Wildmoor of £90000.

7.6 **Definitive Map Review**

Review of the Definitive Map was ongoing and an update would be available at the next meeting.

8. **Any Other Business**

8.1 **New Path Proposal linking Ascot Station and Kings Ride**

This was primarily for the benefit of rail commuters. There were two options under consideration:-

Option 1 – north of the railway line. Network Rail had been opposed to this proposal in the past due to the increased potential for trespass and vandalism, in addition to concerns that the route was not overlooked.

Option 2 – south of the railway. The difficulty with this option would be crossing the Ascot to Camberley railway line. Consideration of this option was being further investigated.

8.2 **Consultations**

- (i) [DEFRA – NE consultation on fire restrictions - www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/nefireconsult.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/accessopen/nefireconsult.pdf)

NE was seeking views on the activation and expiry of fire prevention restrictions under CROW. A copy of the consultation document and feedback form would be provided on request. Any comments to be received by 1 October.

- (ii) Department of Transport – Local Transport Planning
www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/localtransportplanning/

This consultation welcomed comments from any members of the public interested in the future of local transport planning in England. The closing date is 19 October.

(iii) Consultation on the proposals to improve access to the English coast

Copies of the British Horse Society's response to the consultation were distributed to interested members.

8.3 Love Parks Week

Diana Pidgeon informed the Forum of Love Parks Week, which would take place from 15-22 June 2008. Any ideas for events that the LAF could get involved in were to be sent to Sally Coulson. **(ACTION – All)**

8.4 The Cut

This route was still at an aspirational stage. It was not well supported by local landowners. The Forum would be kept informed.

8.5 Foot and Mouth Disease

There was discussion of the current situation relating to Foot and Mouth. Guidance from DEFRA did not recommend large scale closures of paths in the surveillance area. The Council would work closely with owners in infected areas. Current advice was to cancel or postpone indefinitely all countryside events which cross farmland/ grazed areas. A press release had been issued and a statement on the website asked people to be considerate and avoid unnecessary visits to farmland. Richard Walton would liaise with the Corporate Communications team.

(ACTION – Richard Walton)

Arising in discussion -

- Livestock grazing on Council owned land could not be moved.
- Agricultural operations were being cancelled.
- All bridleway flaying had been cancelled.
- Windsor Great Park was closed and signs were being displayed on the SPA side of the dual carriageway
- Advice to all countryside users was available on the DEFRA website.
- Closure powers were in the hands of DEFRA. Although land owners could not close paths they could put up notices requesting that people desist from using the paths during the outbreak.

8.6 Ambarrow

BFBC was commended on the archaeological dig. The Forum noted that a similar event at Bill Hill was being considered.

8.7 Wellington College Woods

The grassland at the back of Wellington College had been levelled by the Electricity Board.

8.8 Land between South of Drift Road Winkfield and the Surrey Hill and Crowthorne Reservoirs, Swinley Road.

The Forum noted that planning permission had been granted for the construction of an underground water supply main pipeline.

8.9 Marketing and Leaflet Review

A major review of marketing and leaflets was being undertaken. Some views on the Ramblers Route leaflet were expressed at the meeting and Sally Coulson asked for any further comments to be sent to her. **(ACTION – All)**

8.10 Members Interest List

Sally Coulson would update the Members Interests List and would sent it out with the minutes. **(ACTION – Sally Coulson/ Fiona House)**

9. Public Question Time

None.

10. Date of Next Meeting

There was a date scheduled into the Council diary for 1 April 2008. The Forum would keep this date but asked that in future dates should not be scheduled into the Council diary in advance of being agreed/ set by the Forum.

(ACTION – Sally Coulson)

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