



Local Countryside
Access Forum

Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum

Annual Report 2020-21

Contents

Chair's foreword	2
1. Introduction to LCAF	3
2. Annual reports	4
3. Meetings	4
4. Current membership.....	4
5. Overcoming challenges.....	5
5.1 Membership changes.....	5
5.2 Adapting during the pandemic.....	6
5.3 Residents' engagement with the countryside	6
5.4 Impact to outdoor spaces	7
6. Successes	8
6.1 Crowthorne FP8 – Broadmoor Farm	8
6.2 Share the trail signs	9
6.3 New footpath link in Sandhurst.....	10
6.4 New accessible countryside walking route	11
7. Horizon scanning.....	13
7.1 RoWIP2 mid-term review	13
7.2 Bracknell Forest Definitive Map and Statement of Rights of Way consolidation ..	14
Appendix 1: LCAF member's interest list 2020-2021.....	15

Chair's foreword

“This annual report covers a two-year period, most of which was impacted the extraordinary challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. For many residents, access to Bracknell Forest's open spaces and Public Rights of Way provided invaluable relief from the restrictions imposed on normal life. The substantial increase in walking, cycling and other permitted outdoor activities demonstrated how important access to Bracknell Forest's parks and countryside is to residents. The extensive green spaces have long been recognised as a major asset for the borough and many people have now discovered new places which they continue to visit.

The Local Countryside Access Forum consists of residents with an interest in all forms of access to the open-spaces and countryside. It has a statutory role to advise Bracknell Forest Council on Public Rights of Way and access to the open spaces. We have adapted to meeting virtually and continued to have formal meetings three times each year during the pandemic. We welcome the active and supportive engagement of council officers from the Parks and Countryside team. Together we can monitor issues that arise and consider improvements that can be made.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic improvements and additions to the Public Right of Way network have been made as highlighted in the report. The Forum has also identified further additions that would enhance the network should resources become available.

If you are interested in countryside access, please consider joining us, we are especially looking for anyone with experience of accessibility to make the borough's countryside usable by as many people as possible.”

Colin Bird

Chair, Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum

1. Introduction to LCAF

The Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum (LCAF) is an independent advisory body composed of entirely of volunteers.

The forum was set up by Bracknell Forest Council under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), and the first meeting took place on 27 March 2003. LCAF has one statutory function, which is to advise the council and others on the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area.

LAFs can comprise up to 22 members who represent a broad range of interests. At the time of writing this report (January 2022), LCAF has 11 members who represent users of public rights of way (walkers, horse-riders, cyclists etc.), councillors and other relevant interests, such as nature conservation. Information about the current forum membership, and the changes to membership over the past two years, can be found later in this report.

Bracknell Forest Council provides officer support to LCAF, including organising meetings, recruiting new members, drafting reports in consultation with members, and providing training where appropriate.

LCAF operates in line with the [Local Access Forums \(England\) Regulations 2007](#) and our [agreed terms of reference](#).



LCAF members at the **Share the trail** sign unveiling. See update under 6.2

2. Annual reports

It is a requirement under The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007 for each local access forum to prepare an annual report on the discharge of its functions. The report shall be published by the local access forum's appointing authority, which in LCAF's case is Bracknell Forest Council.

The annual reports for Bracknell Forest LCAF, for the period 2020 and 2021, has been combined into one document to take into account the effect Covid-19 has on interrupting the delivery of many of LCAFs processes.

3. Meetings

Six meetings were conducted over the course of two years. One was held in person at the Time Square council offices in Bracknell. The remaining five meetings were conducted virtually during the coronavirus pandemic. Each meeting lasted for approximately two hours.

Date	Location	No. of members in attendance	No. of officers in attendance*	Apologies	Observers
4 February 2020	Time Square, Bracknell	8	1	2	-
9 June 2020	Online	8	3	4	-
13 October 2020	Online	7	2	3	-
2 February 2021	Online	8	1	2	-
9 June 2021	Online	10	3	1	-
12 October 2021	Online	8	2	2	2

* Not including officers responsible for administering meetings.

[Agenda and minutes](#) for LCAF meetings are available on the Bracknell Forest Council website.

4. Current membership

The table in [Appendix 1](#) lists LCAFs current members, their role on the forum, and areas of personal interest in relation to outdoor access and recreation.

LCAF is fortunate to have good representation for rights of way users and Councillors. Members are very knowledgeable about Bracknell Forest rights of way and recreational routes. This is a massive help when discussing how to improve the connectivity of the local network of footpaths, byways, bridleways and cycleways.

There are a couple of areas where LCAF is seeking greater representation. This includes local landowners, to fill the gap left when the member from The Crown Estate left the forum. LCAF would also like to have disabled representation, to provide specialist advice and insight into improving the accessibility of rights of way and recreational routes.

5. Overcoming challenges

5.1 Membership changes

There were several changes to the forum's membership between 2020 and 2021. These are typically more than what the forum experiences in a two-year period.

Three members stepped down, Silvia, Simon and Mike. At least one member attributed the reasoning for their decision being because of the change in circumstances caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Bracknell Forest Council continued to work with LCAF to promote recruitment to the forum. The online application form was updated on BFCs website to make it easier for potential members to apply to join the forum. LCAF was also promoted in the Parks and Countryside newsletter in October 2020, which gets sent out to a large distribution list of residents.

The best means of attracting new members seems to be 'by word of mouth'. The forum was happy to invite two new members Jane and Sue onto the forum, who both had previous contact with various BFC officers and LCAF members before joining.

Copy of the Parks and Countryside e-newsletter article

An appeal for volunteers

A message from Colin Bird, Chair of the Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum:

"Our small friendly group is looking for new members to help us promote outdoor activities and access for all in Bracknell Forest.

"We are comprised of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and local councillors who meet three times a year to progress issues about the countryside and the rights of way network.

"These are unpaid voluntary positions. No formal qualifications are needed to become a member, but interested people will ideally have a broad range of knowledge, interest and experience relevant to countryside access.

"If you think you think you're a good fit and would like to find out more about us, then visit our [LCAF web pages](#)."



5.2 Adapting during the pandemic

The forum had to adapt quickly to the rapidly changing circumstances during the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, all meetings have been held virtually. The few site visits that have gone ahead were conducted according to the current government guidelines at the time.

Members and officers adapted very well to these challenging circumstances. LCAF has continued to provide important specialist advice to Bracknell Forest Council. This includes recommendations for new routes, suggestions about how to improve access to rights of way and providing practical solutions for reducing the potential for conflict between users of local byways.

Members look forward to resuming their usual activities, which includes in-person meetings and site visits, when it is legally allowed, and deemed safe to do so.

5.3 Residents' engagement with the countryside

Around 9 in 10 people surveyed by Natural England in May 2020 agreed that natural spaces are good for mental health and wellbeing. More than 40% noticed that nature, wildlife, and visiting local green and natural spaces have been even more important to their wellbeing since the coronavirus restrictions began. These percentages have remained stable throughout the pandemic.

At a local level, in July 2020 Bracknell Forest Council asked 1,800 residents about their experiences during the coronavirus pandemic through a phone survey. All responses were confidential, and the results are being used to help the council plan for the borough's recovery from coronavirus over the next three years.

Around six-in-ten residents spent more time in nature, visiting open spaces since lockdown began on 23 March and about half of residents tried a new form of exercise or exercised more.

It is good news that Bracknell Forest residents seem to be deriving the benefits of having access to the natural environment. It does mean however, that there is a greater number of people using the borough's extensive outdoor spaces, and in some cases, this increased pressure has led to a decline in the condition of some of these spaces.

5.4 Impact to outdoor spaces



In their February 2021 meeting, the forum discussed the increased use of local parks and countryside during the pandemic, which included Public Rights of Way (PRoWs).

The huge surge in people accessing outdoor spaces for fresh air and exercise, had led to many paths becoming eroded. The impact was particularly noticeable during the wetter autumn and winter months, and paths which were not surfaced were most at risk of damage. Many residents were also not using paths and walking on the grass beside the paths so they could socially distance.

Members noted that accessible routes which have good surfaces in areas such as Lily Hill Park were coping better with the increased usage.

It was hoped that as new [Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces \(SANGs\)](#) were opened, residents would visit different places and decrease demand on individual sites. Paths without surfacing in new SANGs meant they may not be suitable for winter use and were also an accessibility concern as they weren't suitable for wheelchair users. The Forum expressed a desire for paths in existing and new SANGs to be effectively surfaced where possible.

6. Successes

6.1 Crowthorne FP8 – Broadmoor Farm

LCAF members advised Bracknell Forest Council how they could improve access along Crowthorne Footpath 8, at Broadmoor Farm. This would involve replacing the step-over stiles (pictured below) with more accessible options for RoW users.



The council discussed the matter with the landowner responsible for the Broadmoor estate. The agreed option was to replace the tall metal stiles with bridle and kissing gates.

The pictures below, show the improvements. These include a new and more accessible pedestrian gate, a kissing gate, and a gap, where no replacement furniture was required.



Identifying and removing hindrances to using Rights of Way is a policy of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP2).

LCAF works with Bracknell Forest Council, the [South East Berkshire Ramblers](#) (part of the Ramblers Association) and [Bracknell Conservation Volunteers](#) to improve accessibility of rights of way in the borough.

The great news is that the partnership-led work to improve access to rights of way means that only one of the borough's footpaths (in Binfield) now has a traditional type of stile remaining.

6.2 Share the trail signs

New share the trail signs were developed and installed at the following byways open to multiple types of users in Bracknell Forest:

- Penfurzen Lane
- Hogoak Lane
- Snipes Lane
- Hawthorn Lane
- Berry Lane

The purpose of the new signs is to encourage responsible and courteous use of the byways by all users i.e. horse riders, trail riders, walkers horse-drawn carriages, motor vehicles and cyclists. There are different versions of the signs, with and without 4X4's, as some of the byways are subject to width restrictions.

This project was run by The Trail Riders Fellowship, in partnership with LCAF, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest Council and British Horseriding Society (BHS) and The Ramblers.

The TRF is keen to encourage bikers and horse riders to share trails which each have a right to use with consideration and respect. Every encounter is an opportunity to improve relationships between two groups of countryside users that simply want to be out riding and enjoying the countryside.

Further guidance about [sharing the trail](#) is available on the TRFs website.



Pictured clockwise from left: Copy of the sign design, official unveiling by two LCAF members and rights of way users, and the new sign at Berry Lane (Warfield Byway 4).

6.3 New footpath link in Sandhurst

LCAF had supported the idea of turning the remaining part of the Three Castles Path at Ambarrow Court into a public footpath.

Bracknell Forest Council worked with Network Rail and The National Trust to permanently divert a footpath through Ambarrow Hill. The closure of the railway crossing (Grid Ref SU 82681 62707) was proposed by Network Rail for safety reasons. The LCAF supported the closure as a safer and nearby alternative was available by re-opening the footbridge around 300 metres further north.

As part of these improvements a new footpath (Sandhurst footpath 27) has also been established at neighbouring Ambarrow Court. This now better links the nearby footpaths, and follows the route of the Three Castles Path, which is a long distance route that runs for 60 miles (96.5 kilometres) between Windsor and Winchester.



6.4 New accessible countryside walking route

An action in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is to review and update the three Accessible Rural Route guides. These were previously on BFCs countryside walking page but were removed due to containing out-of-date information.

LCAF members have developed a 3.3 miles (5.3 km) circular walking route taking in Cabbage Hill and scenery along The Cut waterway. The route follows surfaced paths (tarmac or firm hoggin) with only a few pedestrian gates to get through at Garth Meadows (to keep cattle in) and Cabbage Hill. The fact the paths are surfaced and there are no step-over stiles, makes the route more suitable for wheelchair users or those with pushchairs.

Members captured some photos of the stages of the route on their site visit, which are shared below. A draft map and text are being drawn up by Bracknell Forest Council. When a draft is ready, it will be checked and approved by LCAF members, before being provided on BFCs website.



1 Typical accessible gates at Cabbage Hill



2 Exit from Quelm Lane (North) to Harvest Ride



3 Quelm Lane crossing on Harvest Ride (looking North)



4 Route from Lyon Oaks into Kennel Lane



5 Access to Garth Meadows at bridge over The Cut from Anneforde Green. This was the only place where opening the gate could be difficult for a wheelchair user especially coming from the bridge.

7. Horizon scanning

7.1 RoWIP2 mid-term review

In February 2022, Bracknell Forest Council officers updated LCAF members about their intention to review the [Bracknell Forest Rights of Way Improvement Plan](#) in 2022.

The Bracknell Forest RoWIP2 was produced in 2017 with the intention to review it mid-way through its lifespan. The purpose of such a review is not to re-launch the RoWIP2 or to create a shift in policy, but to provide a review of how well targets and actions are being achieved and to re-evaluate the existing agreed priorities for the remainder of the plan.

The method chosen to achieve this is to assess the following:

- Significant changes in RoW legislation and policy
- Improvements to local RoW since 2017
- Recommendations to improve local RoW
- Progress made with delivering Actions identified in the plan.

The review will be led by Bracknell Forest Council, with input required from LCAF, who are a key stakeholder in the process.

LCAF will also need to continue the work with BFC to deliver actions where the forum is identified as a key organisation. A couple of examples include, drawing on members knowledge and experience of using rights of way to update the route guides on the council's website.



Encourage use of PRow via events, publicity and marketing					
Action ref.	Proposed Actions	RoWIP Policies	Resource Requirements	Key Organisation Lead Partner(s) in Bold	Performance Measures / Timescales
1.	Review and update the circular countryside walking routes available on the council's website. Also review circular cycling routes on Rights of Way and with links to adopted highway cyclepaths and permissive route in public open spaces.	4.3	✓	BFC LCAF Highway Authority	Number of PDF routes / maps updated and available on BFCs website by 2021

7.2 Bracknell Forest Definitive Map and Statement of Rights of Way consolidation

At the same February meeting, BFC officers informed members that the [Bracknell Forest Definitive Map and Statement](#) was also due a review in 2022.

The last consolidation of the Definitive Map was published in 2013, so the review was due to be carried out in 2022 and published in 2023. All changes made since 2013 were under the council's watch so it was expected to be a simpler process than in 2013, which involved searching through old County Council documents.

The Forum's Chairman Colin Bird expressed that the forum had an interest in this being completed as it provides a legal basis for all PRow.

Appendix 1: LCAF member's interest list 2020-2021

Role	Name and description of interest
Chair	<p>Mr Colin Bird has been Chair of the forum since February 2018. He is a keen walker of the local area and is enthusiastic about promoting outdoor recreation and greater use of the countryside. Colin also has some knowledge of farming issues, having worked in agricultural research.</p> <p>Colin is the Secretary and Footpath Secretary of the South East Berkshire Ramblers which is the local group of the national Ramblers organisation. He is also the Chairman of The Bracknell Forest Society, which is a local Civic Society providing a politically independent voice to promote, protect and improve Bracknell Forest as a place to live, work and enjoy.</p>
Vice-Chair	<p>Mr Richard Mosses has been Vice Chair since March 2016. Richard is a keen walker and represents countryside users on the forum. He is an active member of several organisations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South East Berkshire Ramblers • National Trust • Woodlands Trust • RSPB • Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).
Committee Member	<p>Councillor Michael Brossard is a borough councillor for Central Sandhurst ward Cllr. He sits on several council committees and is also a representative for the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust. Michael takes a keen interest in local wildlife and is enthusiastic about promoting access to the outdoors for the purpose of recreation and enjoyment of the area.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Councillor Alvin Finch is a borough councillor, for Priestwood and Garth ward Cllr, and he also sits on several council committees. Alvin is enthusiastic about promoting access to the outdoors for the purpose of recreation and enjoyment of the area.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Mrs Jenny Yung is a self-employed groom, riding instructor (at Tally Ho Stables), hack escort and reiki practitioner. Jenny has lived, worked and ridden in the Ascot, Winkfield and Binfield areas all her life and is very interested in helping people to appreciate the countryside. Her knowledge and experience about local horse riding is valued on the forum.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Mr Hugh Fitzwilliams is a Warfield Parish Councillor. He retired as BFC's Rights of Way Ranger in 2013, a post he held for 12 years. He has an intimate knowledge of the local PROW network, is an active walker, hedge layer and countryman.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Mr Richard Elsbury has a long-standing interest in environmental conservation, and he is a member of the Bracknell Conservation Volunteers (BCVs), who do a lot of valuable practical conservation work throughout the borough. He is also a keen walker.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Mr Geoff Paxton represents users of countryside and local rights of way. Geoff has been a Winkfield Parish Councillor since May 2011, which means he has excellent knowledge of the Winkfield parish, and how outdoor recreation and greater use of the countryside can be promoted to residents.</p>

Role	Name and description of interest
Committee Member	<p>Mr David Warren represents users of countryside and local rights of way. He is an active member of the Trail Riders Fellowship and is keen to maintain easy access for all users of rights of way across the borough. David has a good working knowledge of rights of way, including the differing levels of access available to the public, depending on their choice of travel. He's keen to ensure that access rights are clearly understood, by the different user groups, to avoid any confusion.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Mrs Susan McDaid walks and cycles a lot around the Bracknell area and enjoys using our parks and countryside. Susan is passionate about local wildlife and the impact open green spaces can have on our mental health. She appreciates the spaces we have and the paths and lanes that link them, and wants to help promote, preserve and extend them. Susan is good at helping people manage change and make improvements, which is a useful skill to have on the forum.</p>
Committee Member	<p>Mrs Jane Rimmer is our newest member to the forum, having applied to join in 2021. Jane is a local horse rider and has local use and knowledge of the Bracknell Forest countryside, which will add value to the forum. She is keen to ensure the views, needs and opinions of local horse riders are heard.</p>