

Bracknell Forest Local Countryside Access Forum



Annual Report 2017

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1. Introduction

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 (LCAF), whose work is becoming ever more important due to the localism agenda coming from central government.

2. Notable events during the year

There were 3 meetings (each lasting approximately 2 hours), an annual LAF conference, 3 meetings of the Berkshire LAF Chairs (30th January, 19th June and 21st September) and site visits to Hawthorn Lane/Hogoak lane and Cabbage Hill SANG.

2.1 Meetings at Easthampstead House, Bracknell

7 February: Attended by 8 LCAF Members, 5 Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) officers and 1 observer.

20 June: Attended by 10 LCAF Members and 4 BFC officers and 2 observers.

10 October: Attended by 7 LCAF Members and 4 BFC officers and 1 observer. Agenda and minutes for LCAF meetings are available on the BFC website under Council meetings, agendas and minutes.

<http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=264&Year=0>

2.2 Matters of interest arising from the 3 LAF Chairs' meetings in 2017

Attended by LCAF Chairman, Peter Radband and in some cases BFC officers.

The diversity of the authorities which are represented on the group means that a wide variety of topics are discussed, some of which are of greater relevance to our Bracknell Forest LAF than others.

The effect of Brexit and Farm Subsidies arising from the Queen's speech has been a major concern for those LAFs where there are a substantial number of farms and agricultural businesses. Meetings have been held with LAFs and local MPs in an attempt to curry support and seek assurance that access to the countryside will be maintained post Brexit.

Discussion was held on the value of the recent joint LAF training session, and it was agreed that such sessions were well worth the effort and expense, as not only did they enhance the knowledge of members it also helped develop the LAF member network.

Shared site visits between LAFs were discussed, and it was agreed that as well as being a chance to get out on the ground it provided the opportunity for LAFs to get a good overview of the problems encountered in surrounding areas and share ideas as to how best to resolve them.

The issues thrown up by the planned M4 Smart Motorway development were discussed at length, especially in relationship to the maintenance of rights of way which could become compromised, but also the possibility of rectifying issues which arose with past development works on the motorway. Although the M4 does not pass through Bracknell Forest its proximity is such to make it of relevance to our residents.

It is felt that the group has value and relevance to the work of the LAFs and every effort should be made to not only perpetuate its existence but also to develop its membership.

2.3 Annual LAF Conference

Two LCAF Members attended the annual LAF conference which is organised by Natural England. Themes included avoiding the desire to preserve the environment through limiting access and the issues with discourteous dog walkers. The success of LCAF in Shropshire to recruit from interested groups and encourage tourism was also discussed however it was acknowledged these approaches would not work for Bracknell Forest.

2.4 Site visit to Hawthorn Lane / Hogoak Lane, 30th May

A site visit was organised by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to review the work that had been carried out in partnership with BFC to implement the Traffic Regulation Order on these rural cross boundary Byways.

Hawthorn Lane had a TRO established some time ago to combat vehicle damage and fly tipping, and Hogoak Lane had recently had the same Order put in place for the same reason. Members commented at the meeting on the 20th June that Hogoak Lane had been markedly more damaged than Hawthorn Lane, as the landscape had not yet recovered from the damage before the bollards were put in place, however there was less fly tipping and the difference was beginning to be evident.

Members also commented that it was important not to demonise legitimate users, and to find out the reasons behind the vehicle damage.

2.5 Cabbage Hill SANG, 10th July

Members enjoyed a visit to Cabbage Hill courtesy of Berkeley Homes and Elkie Lees, its Divisional Land Director. The site is part of the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) that is being provided as part of the housing development in Warfield. Members were interested in discussing the following topics on the site visit.

- The concept of the East/West Greenway - why has Berkeley's implemented it so fully and so enthusiastically.
- The issues & 'consumer' attitudes when housing replaces a rural environment.
- The Developers views on the need for and the value of: Landscape design, movement, recreation and leisure facilities and how these contribute to 'well being' and attractive living.
- The issues of drainage and flood prevention and how this can be integrated into the landscape design.
- How the site will look and feel when fully developed in 2020?"
- Linkages to surrounding areas, further new developments and rights of way.

Members thanked Elkie for her informative and engaging presentation on the site.

3. Advice given by LCAF to Section 94 Bodies

3.1 The New Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP2)

The Forum was notified of Bracknell Forest Council's intent to produce a new RoWIP for the borough in February 2017. LCAF provided consultation advice from the earliest stages of the plan's production, right through to its approval in December 2017.

The public consultation on the plan was carried out by BFC in 2 phases; the first consisted of a questionnaire which was primarily targeted at rights of way users, but which was designed so that it could also be completed by those unfamiliar with RoW. LCAF helped tailor the questionnaire and assisted in its distribution on rights of way, at libraries, parish and town council offices, Borough Council offices, The Look Out Discovery Centre and tack shops. The survey was also promoted on the council's website, through social media and to council employees via BFCs intranet.

Members also participated in workshops and discussions on RoWIP2 as part of their meetings. The Forum advised BFC on the structure and content of the plan and its

vision, policies and actions before the second phase of the public consultation in early August.

4. Successes

4.1 Example of partnership working

Regular attendance by the Chairman and a BFC officer at LAF Berkshire Chairs meeting enables an exchange of ideas and gives an opportunity to discuss cross-border matters.

4.2 RoWIP2

LCAF were thanked by Bracknell Forest Council for their invaluable input into production of the plan, which received positive feedback from Natural England.

4.3 Accessibility Improvements to PRow

a) *Gate/Stile replacement*

LCAF, BFC and the South East Berkshire Ramblers (part of the Ramblers Association) continue to work together to improve accessibility of Public Footpaths, which meets targets set out in the new RoWIP2. This involves rangers working with SEBR volunteers to replace the older “step over” or “squeeze” stiles with new metal or wooden self-closing pedestrian gates. The Bracknell Conservation Volunteers (BCVs) also provide valuable assistance with this work.

A wooden pedestrian gate has been provided along Binfield FP2 and 4 footpaths have been improved in Winkfield parish, which are listed below.

FP 19 - 4 new wooden pedestrian gates, 1 metal gate and 1 metal kissing gate

FP7 - 4 new wooden pedestrian gates

FP5 - 2 new metal pedestrian gates

FP13 (pictured over page) - 1 new wooden pedestrian gate



Before - A wooden stile which would have been difficult for some PRow users to access.



After - A more accessible wooden pedestrian gate.

b) Surface Improvements

Surface improvement works have been carried out on Sandhurst FP18, Warfield BW10 (Hogoak Lane improvement connected to TRO), Bracknell FP8 and Yateley FP 503.



Bracknell FP8, before and after resurfacing work to mitigate wet conditions.



Paths in Shepherd Meadows have been surfaced to improve year-round access. Paths are in the floodplain of the Blackwater River, in a Site of Special Scientific Interest and also public footpaths in Hampshire (Yateley FP 503).

Surfaced paths will reduce erosion and spreading of width of path around muddy areas.

The works have been carried out to improve the site as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace, to provide an alternative place for recreation away from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

5. Membership changes

Simon Yates joined the forum, which increased the number of members to 10, which is the minimum membership as set out in the LAF (England) Regulations 2007 (3.- (1))

Simon is a keen mountain biker, walker and an amateur bird watcher. His background is with the Royal Navy and he has significant experience with stakeholder engagement and is being trained in environmental management which LCAF could put to good use.

The Forum also received an expression of interest from Richard Elsbury, who has a background in conservation volunteering, working with the Bracknell Conservation Volunteers (BCVs) who do a lot of excellent work around the borough in improving the natural environment for the purpose of promoting access and enjoyment of the countryside. Richard will be attending a few LCAF meetings to gain a better overview of the forum before considering formally applying for membership.