

Item 6 – Officer's Report

This paper covers:

- Coastal Access
- SE LAF Conference
- Local Sustainable Transport Fund
- Termination of CSS agreements
- Paths for Communities
- Consultations and Reports

Coastal Access

Natural England is making steady progress with the introduction of the coastal path around the English coast. The website includes all the latest updates on progression of individual stretches:

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/coastalaccess/default.aspx

The latest coastal access maps show that the New Forest coastline is included within the south east stretches, where work is currently taking place in Camber-Folkestone and Folkestone-Ramsgate.

The coastal access work normally progresses to adjacent stretches, so it is unlikely that work will begin on the New Forest coast for several years at the current rate of progression.

Natural England is currently reviewing the [Coastal Access Scheme](#) (the way that coastal access is implemented on the ground), with a report expected after March 2013. The review is likely to lead to revised draft of the Scheme, which will be published for public consultation later in 2013.

Defra has not yet published the results of its consultation on the inclusion of the Isle of Wight in the Coastal Access work.

SE LAF Conference

The date for the south east LAF regional conference has now been confirmed as Tuesday 21st May. It will be held in London. Up to four people from each LAF may attend, including the LAF Officer.

Ben, Lynden, Ruth and Sarah will be attending the conference from the NFAF. Other members are welcome to flag up an interest in attending, should any of those four be unable to attend.

Further details about the conference will be circulated to all members in due course. Please contact anyone who is attending if you would like any questions to be asked, points to be made, etc.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

The 'Two Parks' LSTF work is progressing in the New Forest with a small project team at the National Park Authority dedicated to taking the work forward.

The main objective of the work in the New Forest is to reduce the impact of traffic on the National Park through infrastructure improvements together with the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling. Information will be provided in a variety of formats to make it easier for people to choose sustainable means of travelling to and within the National Park.

Infrastructure improvements so far planned include a new 'blue' route for the New Forest Tour to cover the south-west of the National Park and improvements to rights of way in the north of the National Park, and in Beaulieu, to enable cycling and walking to and in popular destination areas. The identification and promotion of 'New Forest Community Routes' (previously known as 'Core Routes') will also be progressed through the LSTF work.

Local businesses and organisations can apply for grants to fund transport projects through a new [Sustainable Transport Solutions Fund](#). Individual grants of up to £15,000 are available as capital and/or revenue. It is anticipated that the funding will support cycle storage/hire at visitor attractions or transport hubs, provision of electric vehicle charging points, and anything that will encourage more people choose to make local journeys by walking or cycling.

The Department for Transport (DfT) has also recently announced another funding stream to [support cycling in national parks](#), with £12 million being made available. The key points of this fund are:

- The funding is 100% capital
- Applications of up to £5M are invited
- It is likely that only two or three bids will be approved
- All grant funding must be claimed and spent by March 2015
- At least 30% match funding is required. LSTF can apparently be used as match funding
- Applications can include multiple schemes
- Sustrans will administer the fund on behalf of the DfT, but DfT will assess applications.
- Applications need to be submitted in partnership with highway authorities by 30 April 2013. Decisions made by June 2013.
- Suggestions for schemes outlined in the guidance include:-
 - Cycle Hire facilities
 - Improvements to crossings
 - Rural traffic calming and speed reduction
 - Cycle tracks and shared road space
 - Enabling buses to provide cycle carriage
 - Development and/or improvements to off road cycling

Termination of CSS agreements

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) was a precursor to the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme. Both schemes offer payments to landowners to manage their land in a way that provides recognised benefits, and both typically last for 10 years. Initially both schemes were able to include payments to landowners for the provision of non-statutory public access. This meant that as areas of land came out of CSS agreements, they could be entered into HLS agreements and landowners were able to continue receive payments for providing public access.

However, more recently the access options have been removed from the HLS scheme, so now when CSS agreements come to an end landowners must choose between continuing to provide public access without receiving any payments for that provision, or discontinuing such provision.

Within the NFAF area there are two CSS schemes which provide public access; both schemes are due to terminate soon. The two schemes are at [Brockenhurst Park](#) and [Hale Park](#).

Anecdotally, the CSS access at Brockenhurst Park is particularly appreciated by walkers as it provides an off-road alternative to Mill Lane, which has no footway provision.

Natural England is negotiating with both landowners to enter the land into HLS agreements. The landowner at Brockenhurst Park is not interested in continuing to provide current access along the footpath.

Paths for Communities

This grant scheme is still open to applications for projects that can be completed within the next year. Grant offers totalling £137,860 were made to local groups in Sheffield, Kent and West Mersea at the end of last year.

Some of the conditions have been relaxed and, whilst it is still considered desirable, it is no longer necessary to provide 'higher rights' access. Bids will be considered for schemes that provide:

- Improvements to existing PRow that encourage use by a wider range of people with different needs (e.g. improved accessibility for wheelchairs and pushchairs, benches for elderly);
- Improvements to the network to increase the opportunity for access on foot, cycle or horse and to widen the appeal to visitors and residents;
- Promotion of the improved network to encourage more use and better support for local services such as shops, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, attractions and cycle and equestrian businesses;
- Better integration with public transport services and links to popular destinations.

Information about the grant scheme, including a [newsletter](#), can be found on the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c

Consultations and Reports

HCC Design Standards

NFAF members, along with HCAF and SDLAF members, were recently asked to comment on HCC's design standards for countryside access infrastructure. Some sensible and constructive suggestions were made by several NFAF members, and Cath Hart is now in the process of amending the standards which will be used by HCC Countryside staff, and which will be made freely available.

HWT representation to NFDC

Further to his presentation on 'Fresh air and exercise' to the NFAF [last September](#), Clive Chatters sent the NFAF a copy of the Wildlife Trust's representation to the Examination in Public of New Forest District Council's Local Plan. An electronic copy will be circulated with the papers for this meeting – please ask Vicki or Sarah if you would like to be sent a paper copy of the document.

Review of Access Land

Natural England is required under section 10 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to undertake a review of the eight conclusive maps of open country and registered common land in England, some of which were first published in 2004 and others in 2005. Natural England is required to undertake the first review not more than ten years after the issue of the conclusive map. Further reviews must also then be undertaken within ten years of that first review.

As a consequence of the Government's overall budgetary situation, which means that not all of the work that the Department and Natural England consider useful and important can be given priority at the moment, Ministers have decided to defer the review of the maps. Regulations, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, will therefore be made to extend the review period to not more than fifteen years after the issue of the original conclusive maps, and to also extend the period for further reviews to not more than twenty years after each previous review.

Social groups and access

Natural England's latest [MENE report](#) (Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment) looks at the difference in access to the natural environment between social groups within the adult English population. The report looks at how and why people in five different social groups (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic, urban deprived, D-E socio-economic, aged 65+, with disability or long-term illness) do or don't visit the natural environment. The aim of this study, and others, is to inform those who aim to increase the number and diversity of people who enjoy the natural environment.