

Minutes of the New Forest Access Forum Meeting – 3 June 2013
Hythe & Dibden Parish Council, The Grove, Hythe

Present

Members:

Lynden Bowen	Ruth Croker
Joan Cundill	Tracey Churcher
Sam Dovey	Heather Gould
Alastair Duncan (Chair)	Gary North
Rachel Pearson	Leo Randall
Steve Rippon-Swaine	Alison Russell
Pat Thorne	Peter Walsh

Officers:

Sarah Manchester (New Forest National Park Authority)
Rachael Bowen (New Forest National Park Authority)
Sam Jones (Hampshire County Council)

In attendance:

Peter Scott (NF Ramblers)
Sam Smith (HCC Ranger)
Mark Holroyd (NFNPA)
Reg Deacon (Ramblers)

1 Apologies and minutes of last meeting

- 1.1 Apologies were received from members Gordon Garrett, Ben Rayner and Bobbie Lawrence.
- 1.2 The minutes from the last New Forest Access Forum meeting of 4 March 2013 were agreed as a true record.

2 Matters arising from the last meeting

- 2.1 Item 2.1 – A letter was written to Ashurst Parish Council regarding the locked accessible gate but no clear decision has been taken to date by the council.
- 2.2 Item 2.6 – The District Council's consultation on car park charges for blue badge holders has yet to be launched. Joan advised that she had a successful meeting with Barry Rickman and the portfolio holder expressing concerns about the scheme.

Action: Joan Cundill to pass details of the consultation on car park charges for blue badge holders on to Sarah Manchester (or successor) when it is issued

- 2.3 Item 5.1 – agenda item.
- 2.4 Item 6.2 – agenda item.
- 2.5 Item 6.3 – the landowner at Brockenhurst Park has confirmed that they will discontinue permissive access due to experience with littering, vandalism and trespassing. Both HCC and the Ramblers will be offering to assist in maintenance

and repairs in an attempt to reverse the decision of the landowner. It was also suggested that moving the permissive access to the opposite side of the adjacent stretch of Mill Lane could potentially alleviate many of the problems.

- 2.6 Item 6.4 – complete, standards are now available on the website.
- 2.7 Item 8.1 – The Forum supported the application by New Milton Town Council for the fencing of the common which was currently being considered by the Planning Inspectorate. Sam confirmed that all forms of access will be catered for.
- 2.8 Item 14.3 – Joan visited the new zig zag path improvements at Barton on Sea and confirmed all the work had been completed very satisfactorily.

Action: Chairman to write to Barton on Sea Parish Council to thank them for the improvements made to the zig zag path

3 Annual Report – Alastair Duncan (paper 32/1)

- 3.1 Pat Thorne requested that the section referring to the difficulties with the Verderers on page 3 be amended so that it was less critical of the Verderers.

Action: Chairman to amend Annual Report to be less critical in relation to the Verderers

- 3.2 Alastair informed the Forum that currently the NPA is in the process of setting up a new cycle discussion group covering both off road and on road cycling. Either Alastair or Peter will attend depending on the agenda content.

4 Officers Report – Sarah Manchester (paper 32/2)

- 4.1 Sarah spoke to the report summarising the main points. Sarah introduced Mark Holroyd, NFNPA Officer, who outlined the community routes project. In addition Mark mentioned the New Forest Tour Blue Route, a new coastal route starting this year.
- 4.2 Sarah explained in some detail the scope of the Coastal Access Scheme and its forthcoming review, and reminded members that the Isle of Wight consultation results have yet to be published. Alastair was encouraged that there was still momentum for this work and that Natural England were very much engaged.
- 4.3 Sarah asked the Forum to note the National Trails review, Paths for Communities and the LARA reports.

5 Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage (paper 32/3)

- 5.1 The PATHH project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, had now come to an end. Ruth Croker had attended all the meetings on behalf of the Forum and there were 2 clear outcomes relating to education and research. A sub-group had been formed to look at the routes with most potential for evidence of unrecorded rights. Of the current 'top 20' just one is in the Forum's area. A short discussion followed and the Forum agreed to continue to support the work of the sub-group and that Ruth would attend future meetings.

6 HLS AGM

- 6.1 Alastair introduced the New Forest HLS Annual Report for 2012 prepared by the Official Verderer and provided some background to the HLS Scheme and the Board membership. Alastair thought that the Scheme was ill-managed in the early days but that Dominic May had made changes including an Annual Meeting and annual report and that now the scheme was much more transparent. Alastair felt that pressure from the Forum had helped bring about more transparency. Gary North was able to confirm to Joan Cundill that access provision was catered for in all wetland restorations works.

7 HLS Wetland Restoration Site visit (*paper 32/4*)

- 7.1 Lynden Bowen introduced her report about her recent visit to Furzey Lodge and Hawkhill Mires. Lynden concluded that the work could only help access and be an improvement. Alison Russell and Heather Gould expressed an interest when Alastair asked for future volunteers for any future site visits. Alastair also asked Gary to pass on thanks to the Forestry Commission for the opportunity to attend.

8 Countryside Access Plan Review (*paper 32/5*)

- 8.1 Alastair reviewed the work to date, noting that as a result of a number of workshops a final database had been created listing, by means of a 3 tier system in order of desirability, suggested changes. The CAP sub-group is to discuss the 2 questions raised on page 4, item 3.0 of the paper in detail, and views from all members on these questions are sought. Ann Sevier suggested that the CAP should reflect society more, including health and old age and that the connection with the NFNPA needed greater clarification. Sam Jones urged any Forum members to attend the up and coming meeting at the New Forest Centre in Lyndhurst to discuss these issues. The meeting is to be held on Monday 17 June 2.00pm. If members were unable to attend, they were welcome to forward any comments.

Non-Agenda Items

Alastair congratulated Steve Rippon-Swaine on his re-election.

Alastair said goodbye and thanks to Pat Thorne whose 10 years as an appointed Verderer was about to come to an end, and consequently stepping down from the Access Forum.

On behalf of the Forum, Alastair thanked Sarah Manchester for her fantastic knowledge and for doing an exemplary job as Support Officer to the Forum as she was leaving for a new post as Countryside Access Development Officer heading up a team at HCC. The Forum wished her well and hoped that a suitable replacement would be found.

9 Recreation Management Strategy Working Group (*paper 32/6*)

- 9.1 Alastair described how the RMS Working Group had been set up to manage and take forward the implementation of the National Park Recreation Management Strategy but it was clear that it wasn't working in its current format. Oliver

Crosthwaite-Eyre was now the Chairman and he had requested a review of the Group. This has since been completed by Oliver Reichardt, NPA Director, with a suggested structure that was very similar to the original structure of the HLS Scheme. Alastair wrote to the NPA setting out in detail the reasons why he thought this approach would not work; a copy was included in the accompanying paper. Alastair is awaiting a response.

- 9.2 Alastair asked members to forward any suggestions or comments to Oliver Reichardt. Further to a short discussion, members felt it was important that the RMS Working Group decision-making representation should cover the whole of the National Park area.

10 FC update

- 10.1 Gary North introduced his paper summarising a number of key work areas including car park maintenance, waymarked trail maintenance and signage. Gary further explained that the cycle counters had now been in place for almost 5 months providing some interesting data, collected 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Alastair looked forward to the Forum receiving a synopsis of the findings towards the end of the year. Members asked Gary to note the issue of a lack of toilets at Linford Bottom. When asked about the cut and burn programme and the risk to ground nesting birds Gary reassured members that it is done on a site by site, year by year basis and required a licence for the work to be completed.

11 HCC update

- 11.1 Priority working for HCC currently includes looking at the CAP Review, efficiency savings including team structure and considering what priorities the team should be focusing on. Once these priorities are in place this information can be shared with the Forum. Sam also advised that there was an issue with delivery of projects on the ground due to staff resources. It was also noted that with departments merging, i.e. countryside team and property services, there were conflicting priorities.

12 National LAF Conference

- 12.1 Alastair was able to report a high turnout of 99 members at the LAF conference, representing 72% of Access Forums. The theme was 'Sharing Good Practice' and consisted of a number of talks and workshops. The subjects covered included: use of volunteers, problems with urban LAF's, planning issues, PATHH programme, Huddle, impact of cuts, health issues and access for disabled users. Additionally, the conference informed delegates of the MENE programme which carries out 50,000 telephone interviews per year asking questions about access to countryside. This information is now available in a usable format and it is hoped that a representative can attend the next Forum to explain further. Alastair felt that the New Forest Access Forum and Joan's Access for All could combine to offer an interesting and informative workshop to the 2014 Annual Conference covering a number of initiatives aimed at improving access to the New Forest for those with disabilities.

13 South East regional LAF Conference (*paper 32/7*)

- 13.1 Ruth shared with the Forum items covered at the Conference which included a speaker from the MOD, use of smartphones and QR codes, cycling in National

Parks, a project to improve cycle hire and maps in the Chilterns (www.cyclists-welcome.co.uk), an update on PATHH, and a LNP's engagement plan.

14 Reports from representatives

- 14.1 Huddle – Joan reported that on-line discussion had taken place regarding the legal right of mobility scooters to use footpaths. Sam confirmed that HCC's approach is that mobility scooters have the same rights as pedestrians.
- 14.2 Small Grants Scheme – Joan reported 2 applications in the NFAF area had been discussed at the last Panel meeting, one for surface improvements in Fawley and one for replacing stiles with gates in Sopley. Both had been approved in principle.
- 14.3 Community Toilet Scheme – Joan had recently attended a meeting with Gillie Hayball, Lead Ranger at NFNPA to finalise the maps illustrating the location of the toilets involved in the scheme. Lymington and Pennington Town Council have also agreed to sign up to the scheme.
- 14.4 LNP – no update available.

15 Reports from neighbouring access forum meetings

- 15.1 Alastair advised the Forum that having attended other a recent Hampshire Local Access Forum meeting, it was clear that the New Forest had a good range of interests represented and valuable contribution to meetings. There was a discussion at the Hampshire LAF meeting about education and some discussion about fields margins under the HLS scheme. After a short debate, Sam was able to confirm that at a recent meeting, Natural England categorically stipulated that HLS agreements will not prohibit public access to field margins.
- 15.2 Alastair thought it would be worthwhile to discuss with HCAF whether the two Forums could join together and receive some training from, for example, IPROW.

Action: Chairman to contact HCAF to discuss joint training options

16 Elections (paper 32/8)

- 16.1 The current position allows for the posts of Chair and Vice-chair to be re-elected with no restrictions. Alastair suggested that a period of tenure is considered, perhaps in a year's time when the posts are next up for election. With no other nominees, both Alistair and Ruth were re-elected unanimously as Chairman and Vice-chair for a period of one year.

17 AOB

- 17.1 Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB are currently looking to review their Management Plan and are also considering setting up a Charitable Trust.

17.2 Pat mentioned that during the recent Wiggle Ride it was difficult overtaking cyclists as there was virtually a continuous stream although she was keen to point out that all the cyclists she encountered were very polite.

The meeting ended at 1.10pm

Date of next meeting: Monday 9 September 9.30am – 1.00pm at Fordingbridge Town Council offices.

DRAFT