

Minutes of the New Forest Access Forum Meeting – 7 December 2015
Brockenhurst Village Hall

Present

Members: Ruth Croker (Chairman)
Alastair Duncan (Vice Chairman)
Sally Arnold
Lynden Bowen
Tracey Churcher
Joan Cundill
Gordon Garrett
Heather Gould
Hallam Mills
Rosemary Mitchell
Gary North
Rachel Pearson
Steve Rippon-Swaine
Alison Russell
Peter Scott
Ann Sevier

Officers: Petronella Nattrass (Hampshire County Council)
Sam Jones (Hampshire County Council)
Mark Holroyd (New Forest National Park Authority)
Vicki Gibbon (New Forest National Park Authority)

In attendance: Sarah Kelly (New Forest National Park Authority)
Dawn Rayment (New Forest National Park Authority)

1 Apologies, introductions and minutes of last meeting

- 1.1 An Apology was received from Sam Dovey.
- 1.2 The Chairman announced that due to ill health Peter Walsh would be retiring from the Forum. Peter had been an invaluable member of the Access Forum for a long time and his contribution would be sorely missed. Recruitment is currently underway for a new member, the closing date would be 11 December 2015.
- 1.3 The minutes from the last New Forest Access Forum meeting of 7 September 2015 were agreed as a true record.

2 Matters arising

- 2.1 As per paper

3 Chairman's Report

- 3.1 The Chairman ran through her report, highlighting that the 'Tame your wild side' video had now been completed; this had previously been sent to Forum members. The video would be launched in the New Year on the NPA website, it was hoped that by promoting this video it would encourage better behaviour of both locals and visitors in the forest. Members asked for a plan to promote the video.

Action: Mark Holroyd to circulate a plan for members to promote the short video.

4 Forum Officer's Report

- 4.1 Petronella Nattrass presented her report to the Forum, commenting that HCC had recently appointed a new Access Team Leader, Jonathan Woods, who would start in January 2015.
- 4.2 The Hampshire Countryside Access Plan 2015-25 was now complete and was available on the website; printed copies would be circulated in the New Year.
- 4.3 It was advised that the National LAF conference would be held in Bristol on Tuesday 23 February, funding would be available for one Member to attend.
- 4.4 Meeting dates for 2016 meetings were agreed as 7 March, 6 June and 5 December. It was agreed that the meeting due to be held in September would need to be checked as it would fall on the first Monday of the new school term.

5 Reports from other LAF's

- 5.1 As per paper
- 5.2 Petronella advised that she had recently attended the South East LAF Chairs' and Officers' meeting where discussion had taken place on the South Lincolnshire and Rutland consultation. Forum Members requested that the consultation be circulated again with response formulated if required.

Action: Petronella to circulate South Lincolnshire and Rutland consultation, Members to comment and Petronella to formulate a response as required.

6 Introducing Bruce Rothnie, Forestry Commission, Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest

- 6.1 Bruce Rothnie introduced himself as the Deputy Surveyor for the Forestry Commission and is now responsible for leading the team that manages Forestry Commission land across 7 counties in central southern England – from Dorset in the west, to West Sussex in the east and to Berkshire in the north. Bruce has previously worked in the New Forest then spent about 5 years away on a number of national roles before returning as Deputy Surveyor in October 2014. Since returning to the New Forest Bruce commented many of the issues and concerns had remained the same and he has been able to rebuild his network of contacts from his

previous connections to help understand the more recent challenges. The Forestry Commission will need to adapt to a new society where technology has accelerated communication and unprecedented amounts of information are now accessible to all.

- 6.2 The Forestry Commission's vision nationally is to secure and grow the economic, social and natural capital value of the Public Forest Estate for the people of England. This means that in places like the New Forest they seek to provide benefits for people, nature and local enterprise.
- 6.3 Bruce highlighted the main future challenges for the Forestry Commission as continuing its level of work with decreasing resources. It will seek to find ways to generate more income from its woodland assets across the 7 counties in order to maintain programmes of work. Other challenges include how it can engage consistently with local communities and communicating the longer term benefits of its land management. Another challenge is to consider how the woodlands it manages need to adapt in the future to meet the impacts of climate change.

7 Walking Strategy for Hampshire

- 7.1 The Chairman advised the Forum that the response to the Hampshire Walking Strategy was now complete and would be submitted on 7 December. Following discussion Members agreed they would be happy to submit their response with some additional comments as detailed below.
- More encouragement for children to go out walking, fun activities i.e. trails geo cashing etc.
 - Connectivity of paths to enable short spontaneous walks
 - More links to education to ensure people know the true benefits of walking
 - More promotion of visitor maps
 - More education on safer walking and responsible walking
 - Parish consultations for safer walking to school

8 Coastal Access

- 8.1 As per paper

9 Regular Updates

- 9.1 *HCC Countryside Access*

Sam Jones advised that his new team leader, Jonathan Woods would start January 4, and would attend a future LAF meeting. A new Community Engagement Ranger was being recruited and would also start in January; this role would be the first point of contact for Parish Council's and user groups. Recruitment is ongoing for a part time project officer.

There are currently two potential enforcement cases being investigated by the enforcement team where landowners had moved fences and encroached on public

rights of way. Sam commented that they do try to negotiate with landowners as much as possible before it reaches the enforcement stage.

HCC and Network Rail were currently looking into the history of who owns bridges for the rights of way which cross the rail line at Denny Lodge, sleepers were currently being used for crossing however this becomes slippery when wet and results in a safety issue. Sam and his team are currently working on the ground to ensure these routes are made safer.

Sam updated the Forum on the ongoing issue with badgers on footpath 95, Fordingbridge, Avon Valley Park. A boardwalk would now be constructed over the top of the sett which would be monitored on a regular basis to ensure both badgers and the public are safe.

9.2 *New Forest National Park Authority*

Mark Holroyd thanked the Access Forum for their contribution to the Partnership Plan, which would be available on the website. Mark emphasised that this is a Partnership plan for the National Park not for the Authority.

Mark drew attention to the recent spending review and autumn statement which was given by the Chancellor he advised that National Park budgets would be protected for the next five years, however the NPA would need to ensure that they are working efficiently and savings should still be made.

The NPA is currently reviewing its Local Plan, Forum Member would be asked for any comments during its consultation phase in 2016.

9.3 *Forestry Commission*

Gary North updated the forum on the recent planning application for a multi user bridge at Fletchers Thorne, this had now been granted with work due to begin in January.

Maintenance was currently underway on official trails with the removal of leaves and vegetation management. The Forestry Commission would be working with the Verderers and Parish Council's on verge protection the delivery of works beginning in the New Year.

9.4 *Small Grants Scheme*

As per paper

9.5 *SSSI Restoration Site Visits*

As per paper

10 Tranquillity Mapping

10.1 Sarah Kelly informed Members that a tranquillity mapping study had recently taken place; this was to determine the most tranquil areas of the National Park. Sarah

explained that tranquil could mean different things to different people ranging from quiet spaces to areas without visual impact from pylons or aeroplane impact.

- 10.2 Sarah explained that the resulting map showed 6 levels of tranquillity from E (most tranquil) to the most highly disturbed areas. The most tranquil areas being in the South East and North West of the forest, the most highly disturbed areas were situated around the major roads and larger settlements. The map would be used by the NPA planning team along with partner organisations and would be available on the website.

A copy of the map is available with these minutes.

11 People and Wildlife Ranger

- 11.1 Dawn Rayment introduced herself as the People and Wildlife Ranger for the New Forest National Park Authority; this was a newly created post which covers the New Forest District Council area, both inside and outside of the National Park boundary.
- 11.2 Dawn explained that the post had been funded by the NFDC Green Way Project, which is designed to help protect the sensitive and protected areas and species of the New Forest from the impacts of increased populations which is funded by the new housing development in the district.
- 11.3 The project aims to reduce impacts from increased visits to protected areas by working with the existing Ranger Team in promoting messages about responsible recreation and raising awareness of the special qualities of the National Park. The project also aims to improve access to non-protected areas, by working with NFDC to create suitable alternative green spaces and by working with HCC Countryside Access team to improve paths and rights of way.
- 11.4 Dawn advised the forum that in order for her to carry out this work she would be working closely with the existing Ranger service and also developing relationships with partner organisations involved in the management of the Forest. She would also be meeting and greeting users of the forest and carry out educational visits.

10 Any Other Business

- 10.1 Joan Cundill advised the Forum that she had recently been approached by Henry Mellor (Brockenhurst Parish Council), who had requested that the NFAF support a scheme to help wheelchair bound college students get into the village centre, all Members agreed.
- 10.2 Hallam Mills informed Members that rogue bridges had been built over mires around the forest, these are both ugly and dangerous the Forestry Commission are currently removing any that they come across.

Date of next meeting: 7 March 9.30 – 1.00, Venue: Ferny Crofts Activity Centre