

Minutes of the New Forest Access Forum Meeting – 7 March 2016
Ferny Crofts Activities Centre

Present

Members: Ruth Croker (Chairman)
Alastair Duncan (Vice Chairman)
Sally Arnold
Lynden Bowen
Mark Cowling
Joan Cundill
Sam Dovey
Gordon Garrett
Heather Gould
Rosemary Mitchell
Gary North
Alison Russell
Peter Scott
Ann Sevier

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

In attendance: Jonathan Woods (HCC Countryside Service, Access Team Leader)
Natalie Hands (HCC Community Engagement Officer)
Jim Mitchell (NFNPA, Interpretation Officer)

1 Apologies, introductions and minutes of last meeting

1.1 Apologies were received from Rachel Pearson and Steve Rippon-Swaine.

2 Matters arising

2.1 It was reported that some responses had been received regarding the South Lincolnshire and Rutland consultation, however it was agreed that the forum did not have sufficient information to form an informed reply. Petronella Natrass agreed that she would draft a response detailing this and send to forum members for any further comments.

Action: Petronella Natrass to formulate a response and to circulate to Members for any comments.
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3 Chairman's Report

3.1 The Chairman had recently attended a drop in session at Bashley regarding the Wootton Riverine restoration it was believed that this would have no adverse effect on access. Gary North commented that a first draft planning application had been

submitted by external consultants, the Forestry Commission had been using external consultants to ensure non bias and to produce a scientific basis for the application.

- 3.2 The Chairman updated forum members on the recent LAF national conference she had attended, commenting that it had been very well organised and informative. Presentations were given on a variety of topics, the Chairman attended 2 workshops; Naturally Healthy and Dementia Adventure.

4 Forum Officer's Report

- 4.1 Petronella Natrass ran through her report reminding forum members of the meeting dates throughout the year, and that at the next meeting in Calshot the forum would possibly be carrying out a site visit more details would follow.
- 4.2 Petronella advised the forum that the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership are currently running a dog walking survey for dog walkers on the south coast more information and the survey can be found at solentdogsurvey.co.uk.

5 Reports from other LAF's

- 5.1 a) Hampshire
Hampshire LAF would be looking at how to gain more influence on equestrian needs, it had been commented that there is both a walking and cycling strategy but nothing for the equestrian community.
- b) Wiltshire
Ruth was unable to attend the meeting and had heard that the Chairman had resigned.
- c) Dorset
There were no reports from Dorset, as Peter Walsh had now left the forum.
Ann Sevier volunteered to attend the next Dorset LAF.

6 Ferny Crofts Scout Activities Centre – Donna Nesityif

- 6.1 Donna Nesityif introduced herself as the Centre Manager for Ferny Crofts. Ferny Crofts was created in 1975 and is one of seven scout activity centres throughout the UK. Over 35,000 children visit the centre each year and enjoy a selection of outdoor activities including climbing, pond dipping and cycling. They work closely with the NPA to ensure the sustainability of the site and use various measures to achieve this including; recycling rain water, solar panels and a ground source heat pump. Donna commented that they currently employ 10 full time members of staff with another 25 recruited for the busy summer months. They are primarily a scout site however most of their customers are now schools.
- 6.2 Forum members asked how the site catered for people with disabilities, Donna replied that there was very little they could not cope with regards to the activities, however not all of the site has disabled access. They do have disabled toilets and washing facilities onsite, but would be grateful for any comments on how to improve this.

7 HCC Countryside Access Plan Implementation – future plans and forum input – Jonathan Woods

- 7.1 Jonathan Woods introduced himself as the Access Team Leader for HCC Countryside Service, he commented that there had been significant staffing changes over the last six months with a reduced number of staff in the Winchester Team; Sam Jones would remain as the Area Countryside Access Manager and also the main contact for the forum.
- 7.2 The main priorities for the team would be byways, countryside access plan, coastal access, team planning / management, strategic network development and bridge programme.
- 7.3 Jonathan said that the Countryside Access Plan is a very strategic document and would like forum members to be involved on how this could be delivered. HCC is currently looking at what had been achieved during 2015 and would begin to develop a report to reflect this in order to try and predict what would happen in the future.

(A copy of the presentation is available on the website)

8 Coastal Access

- 8.1 The last Coastal Access sub group meeting was held on 24 February, notes from the meeting would be distributed in due course. Natural England were currently looking at land registry and who owned pockets of land, they had written to all known landowners and would be holding drop in sessions to ensure they get the correct message across. *(A copy of drop in sessions can be found on the website)*

9 Area Countryside Access Team Update – Staff changes, recent and future work – Sam Jones

- 9.1 Sam Jones introduced Natalie Hands as the new Community Engagement Ranger.
- 9.2 Sam explained that there used to be 6 team areas for Hampshire, however following restructure this had now reduced to 3. The key areas the team focus on are the National Park and Coastal Access. Sam gave an overview of the new team structure commenting that he would remain as Area Countryside Access Manager, recruitment was currently underway for a Project Officer. This is a unique role for this team and the successful candidate would be looking at projects £5k upwards and would be increase project management.
- 9.3 Sam highlighted that there are 935 miles of rights of way within the forest with 2497 separate routes. In the last year HCC had received 684 reports of problems on the network, with 918 being resolved. These problems could range from overgrowth to missing bridges; therefore they are given a priority rating.
- 9.4 One of the major projects that had been completed recently was the ‘Badger Path’ Avon Valley Path, where one of the biggest badger setts in the country had been

found. The objection for HCC was to provide public access and to ensure the safety of the badgers. *(Photos of the path can be found in the presentation on the website)*

- 9.5 Work continues to be carried out on bridges in the area, which fall into one of two categories; under 6 metres and over 6 metres. Sam explained that they need to ensure that the correct materials were used in the correct locations. Local drop in sessions have proved beneficial to ensure the public understand what is happening in their areas. *(A copy of the presentation can be found on the website)*

10 Regular Updates

- 10.1 *New Forest National Park Authority*
As per paper

- 10.2 *Forestry Commission*
Gary North updated Forum members on the recent issues for the Forestry Commission, due to the bad weather they had received numerous complaints regarding the car parks, and they had now prioritised 40 car parks to be upgraded by Easter 2016. Currently HLS funding had been focused on Verge Protection with particular attention in Woodgreen and Godshill. The Forestry Commission would be working closely with the National Park Authority to introduce this scheme at quadrant meetings and would advise that should Forum members know of anywhere this could take place to let Gary know.

- 10.4 *Small Grants Scheme*
As per paper

11 Interpretation Projects – Jim Mitchell, Interpretation Officer, NFNPA

- 11.1 Jim Mitchell gave his presentation on walking with a purpose and an overview of current National Park projects, highlighting that the Our Past, Our Future project which had been 5 years in the making began at the end of last year in conjunction with 11 partner organisations.
- 11.2 Jim advised that a recent study had shown that walking was the main activity people carried out in the forest, but had received comments that access was an issue and that many want more information and guidance on their walks. This had helped to shape some of the OPOF projects to ensure local audiences are involved in the New Forest story in a deeper way.
- 11.3 Jim updated the forum on Recreation Management, Nigel Matthews would lead on this on behalf of the NPA. A memorandum of understanding had recently been signed with partnership organisations and the next stage would be to collate options with consultations further down the line. There would currently be the promotion of existing walking routes, new self-guided routes and sustainable transport options. A new version of the walking section on the NPA website would be live soon which would be more user friendly with the added benefit of users being able to rate their walk. *(A copy of the presentation is available on the website)*

12 Any Other Business

- 12.1 Sam Jones asked the Forum if they could look at the presentation he gave at the meeting and ask any questions at the next meeting rather than producing an Officer report.

Date of next meeting:

6 June 9.30 – 1.00, Venue: 6 June, Kinhead Room, Calshot Activities Centre