

Minutes of the New Forest Access Forum Meeting – 4 March 2013
Lyndhurst Community Centre

Present

Members: Alastair Duncan (Chair) Rachel Pearson
 Lynden Bowen Joan Cundill
 Ruth Croker Tracey Churcher
 Pat Thorne Sam Dovey
 Lynden Bowen Heather Gould
 Alison Russell Ben Rayner
 Gary North

Officers: Sarah Manchester (New Forest National Park Authority)
 Vicki Gibbon (New Forest National Park Authority)
 Sam Jones (Hampshire County Council)

In attendance: Dylan Everett (National Trust)
 Michelle Baxter (National Trust)
 Jo Hatton (Hampshire Countryside Access Forum)
 Peter Scott (New Forest Ramblers)
 Brian Tarnoff (New Forest Association)
 Ann Shand (Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council)

1 Apologies and minutes of last meeting

- 1.1 Apologies were received from members Peter Walsh, Gordon Garrett, Leo Randall, Bobbie Lawrence and Steve Rippon-Swaine.
- 1.2 The minutes from the last New Forest Access Forum meeting of 3 December 2012 were agreed as a true record, apart from paragraph 2.5 which will be corrected to read “Presently is thought that only one local mobility scooter user knows the combination to access the path.”
- 1.3 Alastair Duncan welcomed Forum members to the meeting and introduced Tracey Churcher as the new Youth representative. Alastair then asked observers to introduce themselves.

2 Matters arising from the last meeting

- 2.1 Item 2.5 - A letter had been written to Ashurst Parish Council regarding the locked gate on the all-ability path, however as yet no response had been received. It was noted that the Parish Council does not have to act on the Forum’s advice, and agreed that a follow-up letter would be written to the Parish Council

Action: Alastair Duncan and Sarah Manchester to write to Ashurst Parish Council on the subject of the locked ‘accessible’ gate on the Recreation Ground

- 2.2 Item 4.2 - Actions based on members survey – see agenda item 4.
- 2.3 Item 5.2 - The updated Structure and Remit document could now be found on the website.

- 2.4 Item 5.3 - The website had now been updated with the amended biographies, it was asked that Forum members check they are happy with their biographies and to send any missing biographies to Vicki or Sarah.
- 2.5 Item 11.6 - Members were reminded which members would be representing the NFAF at HCAF meetings in 2013.
- 2.6 Joan Cundill updated Forum members on NFDC's recent consultation on introducing car-park charges for blue badge holders. A recommendation has been made that the Council imposes charges subject to a public consultation. Some concessions for blue badge holders are to be included. The NFAF will have an opportunity to respond to the consultation.

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

3 Foxbury – Dylan Everett, National Trust

- 3.1 Alastair welcomed Dylan Everett to the Forum, explaining that Foxbury is a large area of wood and heathland within the North East sector of the forest. The National Trust had been working on this for some time.
- 3.2 Dylan delivered his PowerPoint presentation, explaining that recently the National Trust had been through a re-structuring process. They are now fully staffed with the exception of an Outdoor Ranger which they are currently recruiting for.
- 3.3 Foxbury was acquired by the National Trust in 2007; it is one of six New Forest commons that the National Trust looks after. It is an approximately 150 hectares site which is separated into 3 compartments including woodland, heathland and ponds. The focus is now to encourage grazing onto the site; approximately 100 hectares are now fenced and available for cattle grazing; troughs have also been put into place to ensure adequate drinking water is available. It was explained that volunteers had also been drafted in to help plant some 1500 trees across 9 hectares and also to help manage the site.
- 3.4 Dylan expressed that his aspiration for the site is to encourage more people and families to visit the site on specified open days and one-off events such as Easter egg hunts, bushcraft activities, and equestrian mornings. 12 km of gravel tracks have been created – but these can only be used for scheduled activities and events run by the National Trust. Dylan is also looking to expand the education offer to ensure school children get the most out of the site.
- 3.5 For more information on the National Trust please contact –
Website – www.nationaltrust.org/newforest
Tel – 01425 650035
Email – info.newforest@nationaltrust.org.uk
- 3.6 An opportunity was then given for questions, these included –
How much of the site was wheelchair accessible?

Paths are as good as they could be at the moment and many of the potholes had been covered and should now be a smoother ride.

Are there any events for wheelchair users?

Currently there are not any, however if these were to be requested then Dylan would look into this.

Are there any plans for toilet facilities?

Currently there are no toilet facilities on site, however during the larger events port-a-loos are brought in. This may be looked into further in the near future.

Where are events advertised?

Currently events are advertised via press releases, poster campaigns, National Trust newsletters, libraries and pubs.

The original management plan indicated that the site would have open access and new multi-user paths would be created – it was intended that Foxbury would take some of the recreation pressure off the New Forest SPA. Other than on the public footpath, is there any public access that is not associated with organised events/activities?

No.

4 Access Forum Survey – Alastair Duncan (*paper 31/1*)

- 4.1 Alastair summarised the paper, and added that an item on “future topics” would be included at the next meeting. Forum members thought that short courses would be beneficial and a discussion would take place at the next meeting as to what topics would be most useful.

5 Annual Report – Alastair Duncan (*paper 31/2*)

- 5.1 Forum members agreed that the Annual Report was a very strong and informative document. Subject to minor grammatical corrections, the report will be sent to Natural England and made available on the website.

Action: Alastair to send amended Annual Report to Sarah for submission to Natural England and inclusion on the website

6 Officers Report – Sarah Manchester (*paper 31/3*)

- 6.1 Sarah presented her report to the Forum.
- 6.2 It was explained that the Local Sustainable Transport Fund is currently running very well and 2 new officers have been contracted to work on this. Members were asked for their suggestions for projects that could be undertaken through the LSTF work, the main objectives of which are to reduce carbon emissions and to benefit the local economy.

Action: All suggestions from members for LSTF projects to be sent to Sarah

- 6.3 Forum members noted that due to the ending of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the inability of HLS to fund public access, the public would no longer be permitted to walk on the private land adjacent to Mill Lane Brockenhurst. It was agreed that this would be a great shame as it was a very useful and regularly used footpath which provided a much safer route than walking on the Mill Lane carriageway. Alastair suggested that the Forum could write to Natural England to raise the issue as an illustration of the desirability of HLS funding access provision. This was agreed, and members also proposed that the Forum write to the landowner to ask about their concerns and whether there was anything that could be done that might result in the landowner keeping the access open.

Action: Alastair Duncan to draft a letter to NE and the landowner in respect of the ending of the agri-environment funded access

- 6.4 Forum members expressed approval of the draft Design Standards produced by HCC, commenting on their professional presentation and usability. The Forum asked that their thanks be given to Cath Hart.

Action: Sarah Manchester to formally thank Cath Hart, HCC, for the Design Standards

7 National LAF Conference – Alastair Duncan

- 7.1 Alastair advised the Forum that he would give a full report from this conference would at the next meeting, as the papers are not yet available. He felt overall the conference was a great success with 80 out of 96 LAF's attending and a broad range of subjects covered.

8 Proposal to fence registered common land at Barton-on-Sea (paper 31/4)

- 8.1 Discussion took place within the Forum as to whether the NFAF should support the proposal for fencing to allow grazing on the common at Barton-on-Sea. On balance, the consensus of the Forum was to support this proposal. It was thought that the grazing of stock on this land would encourage the natural flora to grow and would be the most sustainable way to ensure the common is restored. It was agreed that comments would be made to the applicant in respect of self-closing gate types, and the requirement for full mobility access at certain entrance points.

Action: Alastair Duncan and Sarah Manchester to respond to the proposal to fence Barton Common conveying the support of the NFAF subject to the Forum's comments.

9 Recreation Management Strategy Working Group – Alastair Duncan

- 9.1 It was reported that subject matter had been quite thin at the last meeting and that the Cycle Working Group had withdrawn from the RMSWG. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 14th March; the agenda was not yet available. It was noted that the Research sub-group is moving forward with its work, and that the National Park Authority has provided funding to support research into a local definition of tranquillity, as recommended by the sub-group.

10 HCC Update – Sam Jones

- 10.1 Alastair introduced Sam to the Forum and complimented him on the work HCC carries out.
- 10.2 HCC is currently looking at the allocation and prioritisation of resources and what public-driven projects HCC can take on in addition to their statutory duties. Reported problems on the rights of way network are allocated a priority from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important. Most of HCC's work is focussed on priority 1 and 2 issues, and they are keeping on top of these with all priority 1's being currently up to date. The view is to recruit volunteers to assist with addressing priority 3 – 5 issues.
- 10.3 Sam is working on making stronger relationships with key organisations in order to see where interests overlap, to ensure everyone understands each other's aspirations, and to make it easier to get the job done efficiently.
- 10.4 There are three 'missing' bridges at Sopley, Ibsley and Godshill. As they are large bridges, their replacement will be centrally-run projects. HCC are currently waiting for engineers to standardise the designs of bridges.
- 10.5 Sam advised the Forum that the new bridge recently installed at Linwood Bog had received a lot of negative press; however he now believed that the issues had been resolved.

11 FC Update – Gary North (*paper 31/5*)

- 11.1 Alastair Duncan introduced Gary to the Forum, explaining that last year the Forestry Commission lost around 25% of its staff, and now has very limited resources.
- 11.2 Paper 31/5 gives details on what the Forestry Commission are currently doing. Gary explained that out of a £180,000 annual maintenance budget, £80,000 is spent on a litter contract and a further £60-70,000 is spent on toilets. Gary sees additional, external, funding as being the way that he can get done the things that need to be done
- 11.3 Members took part in a Q&A session covering the following points:
 - QR codes on cycle waymarker posts all link to the FC New Forest cycling page
 - It is not yet known when the bridge at Setthorns will be open to horse-riders and carriage drivers
 - The FC carries out regular tree inspections; sites are ranked 'A' – car parks and cycle routes, inspected annually; 'B' other main routes and B roads; 'C' other sites, not regularly inspected.
 - Suggestions to use the HLS funding to improve car parks, thereby reducing verge parking, have been rejected by the HLS Board
 - Although the FC website shows planned closures to car parks and routes, it is not possible to give advance warning of all closures as some are reactive, e.g. to weather events. Anyone planning an organised walk or other event should use the FC permissions system, so the FC can notify the organiser of relevant closures.
- 11.4 Gary asked that should members have any comments or would like further information to contact him. The FC will report on a regular basis on ongoing work to Forum meetings.

12 Reports from Representatives

12.1 Small Grants Scheme – Joan Cundill

It was advised that there had been no meetings since December. The Panel has reverted to meeting 3 times per year and it was agreed that making decisions by email was not appropriate. HCC has allocated £50,000 to the Small Grants Scheme for 2013/14.

12.2 Community Toilets Scheme – Joan Cundill

The webpage is now up and running and can be visited at www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/info/20052/visitor_information/141/community_toilet_scheme. A map would also be uploaded which will show the locations of scheme participants. The NF Toilet scheme was an agenda item at a recent meeting between senior officers from the NPA, NFDC and Forestry Commission. Whilst all organisations were supportive of the scheme, no money was available to contribute towards it. Currently there are 20 venues in this scheme.

12.3 Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage – Ruth Croker

It was reported that the PATHH project had now been completed. It had been a very successful project and members were encouraged to look at the website for more information - <http://pathh.hwtma.org.uk/>. The education side of the project had been particularly successful. All routes or potential new rights that had been identified by volunteers have now been evaluated, and it is hoped that in due course many will be added to the Definitive Map.

12.4 Huddle – Ben Rayner

Ben explained that Huddle could be a useful tool for those LAF's that do not get much support from their appointing authorities. Ben will keep a record of all the topics that come up on Huddle between now and the next meeting, and this can be discussed in June.

13 Reports from neighbouring access forum meetings

13.1 Wiltshire (paper 31/6)

Hampshire (paper 31/7)

Dorset (paper 31/8)

All the above papers were taken as read. It was noted that Wiltshire Forum members are making use of the MENE data. Hampshire Forum members discussed the forthcoming CAP review in smaller working groups, and feedback from these discussions will be made available to the NFAF.

14 AOB / Items for next meeting

14.1 Alastair Duncan asked Gary North about new ditching works in the Setley area that hit the headlines recently. Gary confirmed that after significant amount of public outcry, the ditching at the layby had been reconfigured to restore parking.

14.2 Alison Russell advised the Forum that members of the New Forest Equine Forum had recently be sent a helpful video about cycling events, this could be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSRj51QFSyg&feature=youtu.be> it has been produced by UK Cycling.

14.3 Joan Cundill informed the Forum that she had received a letter regarding the improvements made to the zig zag path at Barton-on-Sea and that she would go and have a look and report back at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm

Date of next meeting: Monday 3 June 9.30am – 1.00pm at Hythe and Dibden Council Offices