

## NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

**Meeting:** Monday 01 June 2015

**Agenda item 10:** Regular updates

### **a) HCC Countryside Access** – report prepared by Sam Jones, Area Manager South and West Hants

I'm very pleased to report significant progress against our annual programs and project work. Especially following what has been an extremely busy few months both preparing for the summer season, whilst being part of a further Access Team review and the beginnings of a re-structure amongst the Winchester and Area Teams.

Further details of this structure will be discussed, but there will be some key changes and the Teams will be aligning more directly with the Countryside Access Plan (CAP), focussing upon how we can best manage the existing network and engage with and promote understanding with all stakeholders including the users and community groups.

#### **Example projects:**

**NFDC – Mitigation Strategy:** HCC are working closely with NFDC in a 'Delivery role' for a number of improvements into the existing green space and access routes around proposed development sites. Funding is being collected from the Developers Contributions, and the aim of the improvements is to off-set the impact upon more sensitive coastal and inland areas from the expected increased visitor numbers. Both parties have now entered into a Service Level Agreement for a provisional 2 year delivery program; works are currently underway to identify details of delivery and consultation. The NFLAF, been identified as a key consul tee.

**Community Routes:** There is approx. £120k from the DfT's Family Cycling money's awarded to this project. As previously discussed, this is been regarded as the first major investment into realising a Community Route network of key multi-user routes that provide essential links across the Forest and between key locations such as villages and places of interest. We are currently tendering for prices from our contractors for the planned improvements to 3 Bridleways in Minstead, Emery Down and Fawley. Works on the ground are planned for Summer 2015. There has been a slight delay to works starting due to the need to address local interests raised by both the Verderers Office and Residents.

**Denny Lodge Railway Crossings:** This is an on-going piece of work the Access Team are engaged upon with Network Rail, following safety concerns raised by the Verderers office and the BHS. We have agreed a set of actions that will see the long standing issues resolved in terms of responsibility. Dialogue with Network Rail is on-going and one crossing (Denny lodge Bridleway 12) has been closed as a result of safety concerns. Network rail are planning to replace this structure and we are currently discussing how improvements can be made to its surface.

**Ringwood footpath 97 (The Badger Path!):** Unfortunately, there has been a long standing issue with a major badger set within a section of the Avon Valley Path in Fordingbridge - Footpath 97. This is not a straight forward issue to resolve and a good example of where land management, conservation and access concerns must all be considered. We recently held a site meeting with a representative from Natural England along with an HCC Ecologist with a wealth of experience dealing with Badger setts. The scale of the problem came as a surprise to them (it is potentially one of the largest recorded setts in Southern England), but we did manage to identify some possible solutions that will require further investigation. The area will be subject to a full ecological survey to understand the scale of the task then further meetings will be held.

**Hyde 740 'Church Path':** Following March's update, Works have now been completed to rebuild this section of Footpath 740, lost during last years storms. John Cartwright worked closely with the Parish in their Small Grant Scheme application and obtaining relevant consents from the Land

Drainage, EA and NE. Given the exceptional circumstances the Panel supported HCC's and the NFNPA's essential offer of increasing their match funding contribution. Works were completed during March 2015.



### Team operational work

**Annual Vegetation Contract:** This continues to be a challenging area of our work, both due to the on-going need for local authorities to find efficiency savings, as well as the sheer scale of the task itself; the Southern Team alone deliver anywhere between 260-310km of pathways cleared of overgrowth each spring/summer season. A key part of targeting our resources for this work is in better understanding the needs and priorities of the user groups and local communities. As well as prioritising the existing cutting lists established over years of consultation with the general public, the Access Team have also directly invited further feedback from the Parish councils; a process to be repeated annually. This year's program has been successfully procured and works are expected to begin in June.

**Breamore Rail Line:** The Breamore Line represents a good example of how a HCC landholding has been managed in a way that balances both conservation and access. As part of the Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England, various tree works have been completed along the line in addition to the contracted scrub and grassland works carried out in the Spring.



## Contentious issues

***Fordingbridge/Puddleslosh Lane:*** See March update. Current status: Access Team are working with NFDC Planning Enforcement to ensure a co-ordinated approach to enforcing any required changes to the affected site. The encroachment upon Footpath 78B, been identified as a priority within this work. Updates expected shortly from NFDC.

***b) National Park Authority*** – verbal report from John Lynn, including information on the *Recreation Management Strategy, the Our past, our future project and the Give each other breathing space campaign.*

*People and Wildlife Ranger* - members may be interested in this new Ranger role funded by New Forest District Council and delivered by the New Forest National Park Authority under a fixed term contract until March 2018. This role is to help the District Council satisfy requirements of their adopted Recreation Mitigation Strategy for European sites (SPA/SAC/Ramsar).

The post has three main functions:

- To enable and encourage people to enjoy outdoor recreation in sites that meet their needs, reducing pressure on sensitive designated areas.
- To raise awareness of the importance and sensitivity of protected species in designated sites so that people can enjoy them and reduce the potential for negative recreational impacts.
- To demonstrate and promote the positive impacts of the work.

Some of the key duties and responsibilities of this post are listed below:

- Raise awareness of the importance and sensitivity of protected wildlife species and their habitats within the designated sites, especially amongst people who are likely to visit
- Increase visitors' understanding of the potential effects of human disturbance on protected wildlife (e.g. dog walking) and encourage responsible behaviour that avoids negative impacts.
- Record and report illegal activities (e.g. arson, dumping)
- Promote the use of alternative natural green spaces and recreational walking routes as an alternative destination to designated sites
- Provide promotional and educational material to promote the use of local alternative natural green spaces and recreational walking routes.
- Contribute to visitor monitoring, including instances of disturbance and conducting visitor surveys and questionnaires.
- Work with land owners and managers of both designated and alternative recreation sites to assess visitor infrastructure and the practical experience of visitors to identify on-the-ground improvements.
- Assist with educational activities, including environmental education events tailored for children and young people at local education establishments, and contribute to events, workshops, guided walks, talks etc.
- Work with other providers of Ranger services operating in the area to achieve maximum effectiveness of this additional service.
- Build good working relationships with local communities, interest groups and partner organisations to identify and develop joint projects that contribute to and celebrate the benefits of responsible recreation.
- Work with the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership rangers to ensure a joined up approach to information sharing and work along the New Forest Solent coast.

**c) *Forestry Commission*** – verbal report from Gary North

**d) *Small Grants Scheme*** – report from meeting of 12 May 2015 prepared by Joan Cundill

There were 8 applications for approx. £8,474. This was the first meeting of this financial year.

- 1) There was one application from the NFAF area - a reprint of a 2010 'Exploring Fordingbridge Leaflet' by Fordingbridge Town Council. This was deferred for three reasons:
  - a. There was a query about whether the leaflet needs updating.
  - b. Was there any attempt to add information for people with limited mobility/wheelchair users?
  - c. The costing seemed excessive.
- 2) The quality of the applications is an on-going issue for various reasons. Of the 8 applications 2 were awarded, 2 were 'accepted in principle' subject to further information being provided, and 4 were deferred for a lack of information on the application form.

SGS was granted funding of £47,550 for the year 2015-2016.