

NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

Meeting: Monday 07 September 2015

Agenda item 6: Regular updates

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

It has been another very busy and productive 3 months. There have been some set-backs, but none that haven't been addressed and the Team are looking forward to moving on with a number of key projects and to our new structure going live at the end of the month.

Team structure

As reported at the last meeting, the Area Teams are going through a further re-structure, moving from 4 teams to 3. Whilst this will mean a slightly larger area, the Teams themselves are being increased in size and being more structured around the CAP objectives, looking at how we can best manage the existing network and work with our partners.

The key change is the creation of a new Community Engagement Ranger for each Team. These new posts will work alongside the existing rangers in each area, but be focussed upon our work with Parishes, volunteer groups and other stakeholders. It is an exciting new post, and one particularly well suited for our work in the New Forest and South Coast.

Example projects

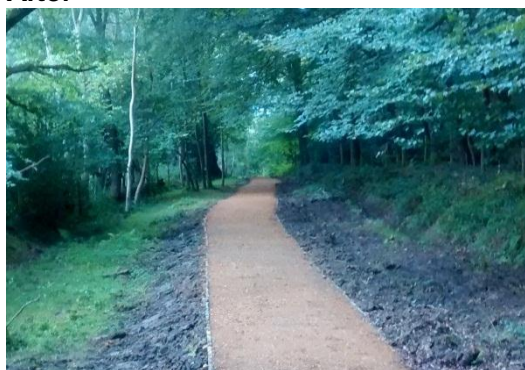
HCC Community Routes - work is well underway on the ground, upgrading and repairing the 3 routes that were prioritised with the help of the Forum; Minstead Bridleways 10 and 1 (Muddy Lane), and Fawley 31. Muddy Lane has been completed, providing excellent year round access on the Parish circular between Emery Down and Lyndhurst (see pictures below). Works are near completion on Minstead 10, with Fawley to be underway shortly.

We hope these to be the first of a number of long needed repairs on the multi-user network, carried out in conjunction with partners including the Verderers, Forestry Commission, Parish Councils and the NPA. Whilst funding will always be a challenge there is a clear need to improve strategically important routes that serve both the local communities and visitors.

Before



After



NFDC/HCC Mitigation Strategy Partnership - with the partnership agreement signed, the Area Team is now undertaking audits in Marchwood and Sandleheath, where development has already taken place or is planned for the future. The objective being to use developer's contributions to identify and deliver improvements to the existing green spaces and surrounding PRoW network.

Whilst NFDC will ultimately determine what is actually delivered, our first role is to identify and advise, accounting for local community feedback as well as existing work such as Parish Plans and of course the existing CAP information that many of you have played a significant role in producing.

This is likely to be along term project, the current agreement taking us to at least 2017, so I'll include key updates for each LAF meeting.

Ringwood footpath 97 (The Badger Path!) - as reported at the last LAF meeting, 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 but a good example of where land management, conservation and access concerns must all be considered.

The Area Team has been working closely with Natural England and an in-house specialist from HCC to identify solutions that reinstate public access but without disturbing or removing the set. Methodology is being confirmed next week and with the funding now in place we hope to start works in the next two months.

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.

Whilst there were delays (largely due to procurement), at the contract start this year, contractors have been working on the network for the last 9 weeks and have additional resources in place to make up for the late start. The Area Teams are also working on the promoted routes and other key parts of the network to ensure the disruption is kept to a minimum.

Contentious issues

Fordingbridge/Puddleslosh Lane - see June update. Current status: Access Team has been waiting on feedback from NFDC Planning Enforcement. Unfortunately, it now seems unlikely that NFDC are able to address the encroachment issues the new fences have created on the Footpaths crossing this area. I'm meeting with the HCC Legal Team later this week to discuss options and next steps to address what is now becoming a longstanding issue and priority for the local community.

b) National Park Authority – verbal report from Mark Holroyd

c) Forestry Commission – verbal report from Gary North

d) Small Grants Scheme – report from meeting of 11 August 2015 prepared by Joan Cundill

I was unable to attend this meeting.

There were 10 applications for approx. £11,200. This was the second meeting of the financial year.

There was one application from the NFAF area. Milford-on-Sea Parish Council requested £2,667 for resurfacing and path improvements to the Pleasure Grounds. The Panel agreed that approval is conditional upon the following information being supplied by the PC, to the satisfaction of HCC officers:

1. The paths must be confirmed for public use for a minimum of 10 years
2. The costs needed re-working to fit with SGS criteria
3. The application lacked sufficient detail of materials, quantities etc.

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