

NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

Meeting: *Monday 07 December 2015*

Agenda item 4: *Forum Officer's report*

1. Future meeting dates

Proposed Forum meeting dates for 2016 are listed below (all on the first Monday of the month):

7 March
6 June
5 September
5 December

2. Hampshire County Council update

- **HCC staffing** – a provisional appointment has now been made to the Access Team Leader role, previously held by Sarah Manchester. We hope to be able to confirm the appointment and an approximate start date with members at the meeting.
- **Hampshire Countryside Access Plan** – limited printed copies of the Plan are now available and will be provided to all LAF members at the meeting. A priority for the new Access Team Leader will be to progress the 'actions delivery plan' and Forum input will be sought on this in the new year.

3. LAF update

- **LAF contact** - John Taylor is now the Natural England contact for the New Forest, Hampshire, and Isle of Wight LAFs.
- **LAF survey 2015 results** – in April this year LAF Chairs and Officers were invited to take part in a survey on the operation of their LAF and to provide feedback on its relationship with the appointing authority and other bodies, including Natural England and the support it provides for LAFs. A report has now been published on [Huddle](#) summarising the responses received (a copy has also been circulated to members by email). The report does not include any conclusions or state what action will be taken, however Natural England has stated that the results will feed into the Annual Report.
- **National LAF conference** – following a survey sent to LAF members and Officers in September, it has been concluded that LAFs would value national conferences being held this year and that LAF Appointing Authorities would mostly be prepared to pay travel expenses for delegates to attend. It has therefore been agreed that two national conferences will be held, one in the north and one in the south, similar to the format in 2013-14. The conference in the south will be held in Bristol on Tuesday 23 February. LAFs have been asked to come forward if they would be willing to give a talk or run a workshop. Inform Petronella if you have any suggestions for topics or speakers.
- **Huddle or alternative** – in September, Natural England asked LAFs about possible alternatives to Huddle, with a possibility of moving more towards Facebook or another social media application. This was discussed briefly at the last meeting and members agreed that Facebook would not be ideal and that Huddle should remain. The majority of responses were in line with this view and the resulting actions from this informal consultation are for Natural England to: promote that Huddle is open to all LAF members; turn off some of the features on Huddle to simplify the workspace interface; and produce new guidance documents and videos on how to use some of the features on Huddle.

Huddle is an online workspace for LAFs across the country to share information, good practice and to seek advice on particular issues. The workspace is managed by Natural England and they use it as their primary method of sharing information with LAFs. It would be good to get as many members as possible signed up to Huddle, please inform Petronella if you are interested in joining.

4. Other

- **Dogs in the countryside consultation** – in September 2014 the Forum responded to a DEFRA consultation reviewing the advice and guidance issued to dog walkers. The Government has since issued new guidelines regarding the publication of information and advice by its departments and it has therefore been decided that Natural England will not produce a dog advice leaflet. This is because the Countryside Code already fulfils the statutory obligation to provide a code of conduct for visitors to the countryside and a dog advice leaflet could have been seen as a duplication of this. Separate guidance has however been issued by Natural Resources Wales using the Countryside Code branding – see [the Dog Walking Code](#).
- **Funding opportunities**
 - *Tesco Local Community Scheme* - a new grant scheme has been launched, for communities to apply for up to £12,000 for local green space projects. This is funded by the proceeds generated from the sale of carrier bags by Tesco. The fund is administered by the community charity Groundwork. [Find out more](#).
 - *Pocket Parks* – a new scheme has been launched by the Department for Communities and Local Government providing a £1.5 million programme of support for communities to establish pocket parks in urban areas. Communities, with the support of their local authority, can make applications for up to £10,000 capital and up to £5,000 resource funding per project. [Find out more](#).
 - A monthly bulletin of rural funding streams is collated by the Rural Services Network, some of which may be suitable for access projects – see the [Opportunities Bulletin](#).