

NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

Meeting: *Monday 12 June 2017*

Agenda Item 12: *Regular updates*

a) HCC Countryside Access (South Area team) – report from Sam Jones

England Coast Path:

Area Team are continuing in an advisory role for sections outside the National Park boundary. Natural England are aiming to get the report for this stage submitted to Secretary Of State for formal consultation by the end of June. This is an exceptionally tight time frame given they are still needing to finalise exact route choice and, with our assistance, cost the delivery of the route.

Assuming the above goes ahead, the next key stage for consideration is the delivery of the new route: by whom, and how the new infrastructure will be delivered on the ground. Given our existing role and involvement in the surrounding network, the HCC team are an obvious choice and we are in discussion with the Coast Path Team in how this could be moved forward. We are of course also working closely with the NFNPA to ensure consistency across the boundaries.

Barton cliff top path lost: Barton to Milford

You may have seen in the news that there was a major cliff slump in this area. The current status is that all public access has been closed down to the area along the cliff tops and the beach below. This includes all rights of way leading into the area.

NFDC's Coastal Management Team are leading on management of the area in general, with HCC managing the rights of way with closure, barriers and signage in place. Sam Jones will be running a stakeholder meeting to consider current position and options available to reopen access in some form. This will take place on June 6th, with current attendees to include:

- Barker Mills Estate (landowners)
- NFDC Coastal Management Team
- County Cllr's Fran Carpenter and Mel Kendal
- Natural England Coastal Team
- Milford Parish Council
- New Milton Town Council

The NFAF should let Sam Jones know if it is felt that a representative of the Forum should be present at this meeting.

Seasonal Path Clearance:

This year's vegetation control contract is well under way, with contractors clearing the routes identified in consultation with Parishes, and the in-house Ranger Team focussing upon the Promoted Routes. The Avon Valley Path is due to receive the first of two cuts towards the middle/late June.

As always, if anyone comes across an overgrown route they can check online if it is already scheduled, or contact the Area Office on 02380605110.

Sam Jones
May 2017

b) Forestry Commission – report from Gary North

c) **Small Grants Scheme** – *Petronella Natrass*

The Panel met on 9 May to consider 9 applications with a total value of £9,075. These included:

- £947 to install a 30m boardwalk along a waterlogged section of Durley FP 9 which is currently unusable for 9 months of the year.
- £252 for new information sheets on existing map boards on Chilbolton Common, West Down and War Memorial Playing Field, Chilbolton.
- £1,744 to replace broken paving stones on the section of footpath Havant FP 90 that runs through St Mary's churchyard, Hayling Island.
- £292 for handrails alongside steep (and sometimes slippery) steps at each end of Buriton FP17 where it emerges onto a road with no footway.
- £922 to replace 4 stiles with gates in Cheriton.
- £289 to repair/renovate steps on Worldham FP 32.
- £1,790 to repair a 140m, deeply rutted section of Froxfield BOAT 43.
- £849 to upgrade a section of the permissive path from the Science Centre to Chilcomb BW 12.
- £1,990 to extend an existing boardwalk in East Woodhay FP 9 to complete this section of footpath.

There were no applications from within the New Forest National Park area in this round. All applications were approved, with conditions on the following three:

- Chilbolton – Community Engagement Ranger (Abby Sullivant) to check board content meets standards and shows routes for all users including equestrians and cyclists;
- St Mary's Church must take on responsibility for the future surface maintenance;
- Cheriton: check to be made that there will be a latch fitted rather than the 'lock' requested for one of the gates.

The future of the Small Grants Scheme (SGS)

Jonathan Woods joined the meeting to give the Panel an update on the changes to the SGS from April 2017, as follows:

Hampshire County Council is reviewing its offer of funding to rural communities and how it promotes grants generally, with all grants to those communities being handled through a single system and process. The Countryside Service has been looking at how the SGS can be incorporated into this offer, which would potentially put the SGS on a more stable, longer-term footing.

The Hampshire Countryside Access Forum and the current SGS Panel are aware of the budgetary pressures being faced by the Countryside Service and by local government as a whole. With their support, the Countryside Service has operated the SGS in Hampshire for .. years, and both the Service and the Council are keen to ensure that this fund continues into the future.

The Hampshire County Council 'Rural Communities Fund' is a new fund that will incorporate a number of existing community grant streams including:

- Community Challenge Fund
- Flood Alleviation Scheme
- Rural Retailers and Community Enterprises Grant Scheme
- Small Grants Scheme – Countryside Access

There are a number of challenges within this new approach that the Access Team are currently working to resolve:

- a) **Limitations of the grant:** as its name implies, the Rural Communities Fund is available only to 'Rural' communities (parishes), defined as those with fewer than 10,000 residents. The Countryside Service is keen to ensure that funding should still be available to larger, urban fringe or satellite communities.

- b) Grant available:** within the Rural Communities Fund the SGS will allocate £36,000. It is proposed that an additional £10,000 will be held by the Access Team Manager for projects within larger communities (i.e. those with more than 10,000 residents).
- c) Minimum grant size:** For the RCF this is currently £1,000; we have negotiated a reduction of this threshold to £500 if the Community Engagement Rangers (CERs) process the grant offer.
- d) Application process:** this will use a Hampshire County Council corporate online grants system, which will require revised guidance and a pre-application expression of interest (EOI) to be developed. We have negotiated that the CERs will be able to review the applications and express views at EOI stage.
- e) Grant decision:** at present all grants are awarded by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Perry. We have suggested that this be devolved to Cllr Rob Humby (Rural Portfolio holder), with Cllr Edward Heron (who sits on the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum) providing a report to the HCAF.

In practice this will mean that:

- The grant fund remains similar to current levels
- It is a corporate grant, so will gain greater exposure
- The outputs from the SGS will be more visible to elected Members and senior management within HCC
- Because of its greater exposure, we believe that this will ensure the future sustainability of the scheme
- Where there are underspends within the corporate grants programme we will be seeking to optimise benefits for the SGS

This is essentially a new grant process which the Access Team are aiming to apply in a way that will continue to deliver improvements to countryside access. It will mean a change in the level of HCAF involvement in the process. We are keen that the Forum retains an advisory role, but this will have to be through a more streamlined process than the current system of quarterly Panel meetings.

We are optimistic that this change will be a positive development for the SGS, but there is some work to be done over the next few months to get this new programme up and running. This will start with the development of improved guidance for the CERs and ACAMs to apply at the EOI stage. The SGS Panel will be asked to help with this; the aim is that the guidance will enable schemes that comply with agreed specifications to go forward directly for approval. For other, non-standard schemes it is envisaged that the Panel's advice will be sought via email.

We remain very grateful to HCAF and in particular the SGS Panel for the time that they have invested in the SGS to date and the many projects that have been funded as a result.

There was some discussion of the proposed changes, after which the Panel agreed to keep the 8 August meeting date pencilled-in but to cancel the November and February Panel meetings.

Petronella Natrass
May 2017

d) Cycling working group – report from Mark Holroyd

e) Historic Routes and Past Pathways Project – Alastair Duncan

Objectives

To identify five new trails, based on existing ROWs in the National Park. These trails will be chosen based on research of their history and “story”.

Project Manager

Gareth Owen (part time) assisted by Steve Fisher.

Features

The trails will be enhanced with new signage, route markers, information panels where appropriate, and “guided experiences”.

Research

20 volunteers have come forward, who will be given training in accessing historical records, mainly from the Winchester Records Office. Each will initially be allocated to research one of the thirty seven parishes contained within the National Park.

Supposition

Presumably the five routes ultimately chosen will be selected from ROWs identified by the volunteers, based on the amount of historical detail and amount of interesting facts gleaned.

Steering Group

A Steering group has been formed, although its purpose has yet to be defined. It has not yet met.

This is headed up by Gareth Owen (Part-time Project Manager)

The Access Forum is represented on the Steering group by Alastair D and Ann S.

Other members consist of:

Helen Barber HCC

Nick Corwen Wilts CC

Gillie Molland NFNP Lead Ranger

Jim Mitchell NFNPA Interpretation and Tourism Manager

Mark Holroyd Transport, NFNPA Transport, Access and Sustainable Tourism Manager

Leo Randall Member NFNPA

Alastair Duncan

May 2017