

## NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

**Meeting:** Monday 02 March 2015

**Agenda item 11:** Regular updates

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

#### **SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS**

**Hyde 740 ‘Church Path’:** Following last years storms, a significant section of bank was lost along with the Right of Way (ROW) – Footpath 740. As well as the loss of public access, the bank loss also meant the adjacent church was threatened by further erosion.

Whilst a ROW can actually be lost due to such events, the benefits of the Path were well reported, and the Access Teams remained committed to work with the Parish and Church to find a solution to what was a common goal.

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. Weather depending, the Parish hope to see contractors on-site early March.

**Denny Lodge Railway Crossings:** John met with Network Rail mid-February, following 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 whose responsibility they are including the surface. An audit will take place to address the condition of all of the crossings; these include bridges, underpass's and level crossings. Bridleway 7 above Beaulieu road station has been prioritised for works.

**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 Spring 2015.

#### **PROJECT PROGRAM – 2015/16**

With the end of the financial year approaching fast, we are reviewing outstanding projects/issues and prioritising those to progress next year. Naturally this is currently active, but one project confirmed is part of the Avon Valley Path - Fordingbridge Footpath 97. Unfortunately AVP users have had to use an alternative route due to this Footpath accommodating one of South England's largest active badger sets. We are looking to meet with Natural England specialists in April to discuss options whereby both badgers and users of the path can be accommodated. Some interesting 'pilots techniques' have been suggested, though naturally, the chosen approach will be a product of affordability and assurance of an effective result!

#### **TEAM OPERATIONAL WORK**

The Team have continued to use the winter season to focus on the back log of issues. Additional works:

**Annual Vegetation Contract:** The Team are working to prioritise the Summer Cutting Program, the contract for which is currently out for tender in the Countryside Service's new Landscape Framework. A further major change this year is successful return from the Parish Council consultations. This was aimed at ensuring we were meeting local priorities where possible by inviting them to identify the priority paths in their area's.

**Breamore Rail Line:** A significant investment has been made this winter season to bring in contractors to work with us towards our Higher Level Stewardship commitments on the Rail Line. These focus on preserving and managing the ecology effectively, whilst still meeting our expectations of it providing a key access link.

## NEW ROUTES

**Lymington Permissive Route to Pilley:** See December update. SJ and JC have met with Lynne Truell (the landowner offering the new route), to discuss the current high level of use on the Permissive Footpath, and the next steps into upgrading the access status to an off-road cycling connection to the Forest. We are awaiting feedback on a safety audit of the road crossing at the Lymington end. Subject to that feedback we hope to progress to the new status summer 2015.

## PARTNERSHIPS

**NFDC – Mitigation Strategy:** See December update. Work is ongoing to structure the agreement and delivery program.

**Historic Ways:** See December update. Still going ahead, the NFNPA are working through further rounds with the HLF.

## CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

**Fordingbridge/Puddleslosh Lane:** See December update. Current status: Wider planning control matters meant any changes to structures (including fences), had to be halted. This has delayed matters for ourselves with regard potential encroachment to Footpath 78B. However, in order to progress we are looking to meet with users groups and communities to ensure full understanding of their expectations, determine what is feasible /appropriate and re-engage with the relevant landowners.

### e) **Small Grants Scheme – report from meeting of 27 January 2015 prepared by Joan Cundill**

There were 7 applications for approx. £17,000 – two were re-submitted from the previous meeting in November. This was an extra meeting to allocate remaining funds for this year.

There was one application from the NFAF area.

1) To rebuild **Footpath 740 in Hyde**, which has been closed since February 2013. The concrete revetment structure on the Ditchend Brook has failed and the riverbank and the footpath eroded. This was exacerbated in the storms of winter 2013-14.

This is said to be a popular footpath linking Hyde and Stuckton with Fordingbridge, and Fordingbridge residents with the New Forest.

The nearby Stuckton church, whose boundary is threatened by the erosion has offered £2,000 in matched funding, and volunteers will do preliminary clearance (20 volunteers for 2 days).

The committee approved the application subject to matched funding being obtained. They agreed to award the project £6,700 as there was a small surplus in the SGS funds. Unfortunately the Parish Council will have to pay VAT on this project as they are not the landowner. NPA will contribute 25%.

2) SGS review. We also discussed revising the SGS application form, which is too bureaucratic, and the lack of clarity with the maps provided. The intention is that applications will be completed on-line.

SGS was granted funding of £47,700 for the year 2015-2016. .

Joan Cundill, February 2015