

NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

Meeting: Monday 12 March 2018

Agenda item 4: *Forum Officer's Report*

1. HCC Countryside Service update

- **Staffing**

There have been two significant changes in the South Area Access Team. In January Natalie Hands left her post as Community Engagement Ranger to join the ranger team at BirdAware. Sam Jones (Access Team Manager) has been seconded to the new post of Rural Programme Manager for one year, with effect from the beginning of February. Both vacancies will be filled as soon as possible.

- **Rural Communities Fund (RCF)**

During the last year the Panel have continued to review applications for grant funding as the Rural Communities Fund has taken over from the Small Grants Scheme, but without the regular pre-decision meetings. Applications have been emailed to Panel members individually for feedback, which is then forwarded to the decision-makers.

The Panel also recently approved a short guidance document for applicants, based on their comments about applications over the last few years.

With the Community Engagement Rangers advising applicants early on the process, the standard of applications has improved greatly. Because of this, coupled with the other changes that have resulted from the transfer from SGS to RCF and the adoption of the guidance document, it has been agreed the Panel's role should change from that of advising to one of monitoring funding approvals. Regular reports will be made to both Forums at their quarterly meetings so that they can continue to keep track of what the RCF is delivering in terms of access improvements.

Hampshire County Council would like to thank members of the Panel for all the time, effort and advice that they have given to the Small Grants Scheme over the years. This has resulted in the funding and implementation of a significant range of access improvement projects across the county, and their contribution to this scheme has been greatly valued and appreciated.

2. HCAF

- **AGM**

At the HCAF AGM on 12 December Rachel Bryan and Alan Taylor were both appointed for a further year as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively. Sixteen members of the Forum had their appointments renewed for a further 3 years and the Forum welcomed the following 3 new members:

Jaqueline England – Tourism, business and education
Anna Hammond – Disability, dog walking and volunteering
Sandra Nichols – Land Management and Farming

3. Consultations

- **New Forest National Park Authority Local Plan** – Ruth, Ann, Fran and Ross all met on 13 February to review the NPA's Submission Draft Local Plan. A draft response to this final consultation was circulated to Forum members for approval and the agreed version was submitted by the deadline of 28 February. I have since received confirmation of its arrival from the NPA's Policy Team.
- **Hatchet Pond** – Footprint Ecology is undertaking a consultation on behalf of the Forestry Commission on the future management of this important and attractive site. The deadline has been extended to 13 March to allow the Forum time to agree a response, which will be discussed under **Item 7**.
- **Defra consultation on "Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit"** – this consultation has just been published and will be discussed under **Item 9**.

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