

Minutes of the New Forest Access Forum Meeting
Council Chamber, Lymington Town Hall
9 March 2020

Present

Members: Ruth Croker (Chairman)
Ann Sevier (Deputy Chairman)
Paul Brockman
Fran Carpenter (Local Authority Rep – HCC)
Mark Cowling
Jacqueline England
Gordon Garrett
Heather Gould
Jane Horton
Gary North
Leo Randall (Local Authority Rep – NFNPA)
Peter Scott

Officers: Adam Vasey (New Forest National Park Authority)
Denise Allen (New Forest National Park Authority)
Alison Perry (Hampshire County Council)

In attendance:

David Illsley (New Forest National Park Authority)
Gail Johnson (Hampshire Countryside Access Forum)
Suzanne Kempe
Petronella Natrass (The British Horse Society)

1 Apologies & Welcome

1.1 Apologies were received from Alastair Duncan, Richard Manley, Henry Mellor, Rosemary Mitchell, Julian Sheppard and Richard Shirley.

2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes from the last meeting were approved as an accurate record. The following matters arising were then addressed:

2.2 Adam Vasey to invite Jim Mitchell (NFNPA) to speak on health, wellbeing and social prescribing at the June NFAF meeting.

2.3 Re the fencing of designated access land at Whiteparish, Adam reported that the NFNPA is not in a statutory position to take action in this case. The Parish Councils and CPRE were suggested as potential alternative avenues for action. Adam to review potential for enforcement under the CROW Act for any CROW access land.

2.4 Re Forestry England's policy on the granting of formal permissions, Gary North advised that FE is currently updating its policies and that a speaker following this update would be more appropriate. It was suggested that Sam Jones might be asked to speak at the December NFAF meeting.

- 2.5 Adam Vasey advised that there was nothing further to report re the car parks review at this time but reassured the forum that he would keep members updated.
- 2.6 Re Go New Forest, Jacqui England reported that she was meeting with NFDC on 10 March and with Anthony Climpson on 11 March.

Action: Jacqui England to email members with an update following the two meetings.

3 Chairman's Report

- 3.1 The Chairman introduced her report highlighting the findings of the Footprint Ecology Visitor Survey and reporting on the Volunteer Fair, particularly in relation to access for the disabled. David Illsley advised that the Footprint Ecology survey will be hugely valuable to inform both planning and other areas such as the targeting of seasonal rangers to specific areas at specific times. The survey pointed to the use of the NF not just as a national park, but also as a local country park and green space by visitors from its periphery areas.

Action: Adam Vasey to circulate the report to members when it is released.

4 Forum Officer's Report

- 4.1 Adam Vasey presented his report highlighting that the NFAF website had now been updated to include a news page and provide a platform through which the forum could raise issues. He also showed members example signage for the Lepe Loop 'Mend our Mountains' project. He explained that he was in the process of contacting active volunteer groups regarding training and equipment needs in readiness for the Habitat Mitigation Scheme. The remainder of the report was taken as read.

5 Additional Reports

- 5.1 Gary North introduced the Countryside Access Report highlighting the number of older trees lost in recent storms, older beech trees being very vulnerable. FE are inspecting trees frequently and Gary expressed concern as to the number of species now under attack from infections. The remainder of the report was taken as read.
- 5.2 Alison Perry reported that approx. 30 to 40 footpaths were currently closed across Hampshire, many due to fallen trees and/or flooding. About 5 or 6 of these are local to the New Forest and it may be a month or more before they are re-opened. The remainder of the report was taken as read.
- 5.3 Ruth Croker advised that Wiltshire was still in the process of appointing new LAF members. Also, that the Cranborne Chase AONB was planning a new walking festival with a historical emphasis which could potentially have positive overlap with the existing NF Walking Festival.

6 Any Other Business

- 6.1 Adam Vasey drew members' attention to the 'Briefing Note from the Waterside Cycling Action Group' with reference to planned improvements at Fawley Waterside and which expressed concern that the potential impact on pedestrians and cyclists had not been adequately considered. He invited member comments.

Actions:

- Secretariat to circulate briefing note to members by email following the meeting.
- Members to email comments to Mark Cowling by no later than 23 March 2020.

7 SANGs; Public access through the planning framework – David Illsley (NFNPA)

- 7.1 David Illsley explained the potential for 'Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace' (SANGs) to divert visitors from internationally protected habitats, outlining how and where they may be created along with key features required. He presented several examples of successful SANGs, outlined the rules governing the management of new greenspace areas and analysed the scale of new greenspace provision in the New Forest District. A copy of the presentation can be found on the Access Forum website.
- 7.2 Concern was raised re provision for cycling and equine use within SANGs. Mr Illsley responded that SANGs are designed to maintain existing ROWs within the site as well as, ideally, to be multi-use and primarily for locals. He recommended that LAFs should submit their access concerns to case officers early in the planning stage.

Actions:

- Adam Vasey to work with NFNPA Planning regarding access concerns specific to the Fawley Waterside development and to report back to the forum in June 2020.
- Adam Vasey to draft guidance for planners regarding SANGs for review by members.

8 Workshop on Future Work Streams – Adam Vasey (NFNPA)

- 8.1 Adam Vasey presented a summary of NFAF outputs, previous and upcoming NFAF work, and areas for discussion: yearly priorities and the annual report. Following discussion two priorities for NFAF work in 2020/21 were agreed: 1) education and tourism, and 2) ongoing accessibility work.
- 8.2 Mr Vasey pointed members to the new format Annual Report (available on the NFAF website) and invited questions or comments from members.
- 8.3 Lastly, Mr Vasey reminded members that a budget was available to members for events and engagement work with Parish Councils. The potential of member attendance at quadrant meetings and the Consultative Panel was also discussed.

9 Natural England Consultation – Land at Bickerley Common – Adam Vasey (NFNPA)

- 9.1 Adam Vasey presented details of the above consultation to members. Discussion revolved around the dates during which access was restricted in order to protect sensitive wildlife; the land being open to access for only 1 month of the year. It was suggested that the forum request NE explore opening access for an additional

month and that the signage also be improved. It was noted that neither the Land and Conservation member, nor the Volunteering member, had been able to attend the meeting and it was felt that their input should be sought.

Actions:

- Adam Vasey to contact the above two members for their input
- Members to provide any further comments by email as soon as possible, and preferably before 20 March 2020.

10 Equine Users – (Jane Horton and Guests)

- 10.1 Gail Johnson (Hampshire Countryside Access Forum) gave a presentation on 'Equestrians in Hampshire': a reference guide for Transport, Planners and other decision makers. Ms Johnson emphasised the important contribution of equestrians to the local economy and the special considerations necessary to safeguard equestrians. She underlined the importance of early input at the planning stage and recognised the importance of local access forums in contributing to this dialogue. A copy of the full presentation can be found on the Access Forum website.
- 10.2 Leaflets and a video previously produced by the NFAF were recalled and Mr Vasey undertook to post a link to the video on the NFAF website. Concern was voiced that the access needs and safety of carriage drivers was not being taken sufficiently into account by HCC Highways. It was recognised that there was an opportunity to work in concert with cyclists to campaign for safe access for both equestrians and cyclists.
- 10.3 Petronella Nattrass (British Horse Society Field Officer – South Region) gave a presentation on the BHS and equestrian access in the New Forest, explaining the role of the BHS nationally and locally in: lobbying for more places to ride or carriage drive, increasing participation, and the creating and improving routes. She explained how the BHS can support equestrian access in the Forest by assessing the condition of routes, responding to reported access issues, and in an advisory capacity to equestrians and drivers. A copy of the full presentation can be found on the NFAF website.
- 10.4 Suzanne Kempe gave a talk from the commoning point of view on the issues arising for equestrians and carriage drivers arising from increased visitor numbers to the Forest in recent years. Issues highlighted included: lack of car parking to attend to stock, verge parking, unruly dogs, kite fliers, large groups of cyclists, a lack of appreciation for the sensitivity of blinkered carriage ponies, and inappropriate interaction with stock. Ms Kempe pointed members to the educational value of the recently updated Verderers and CDA websites.
- 10.5 The NF Ramblers advised that they are currently surveying all the of the Network Rail bridges in the New Forest and offered to provide information to the BHS if helpful.

Date of next meeting:

8 June 2020, 9.30am – 1.00pm, Venue: Blashford Lakes

The meeting closed at 13.15