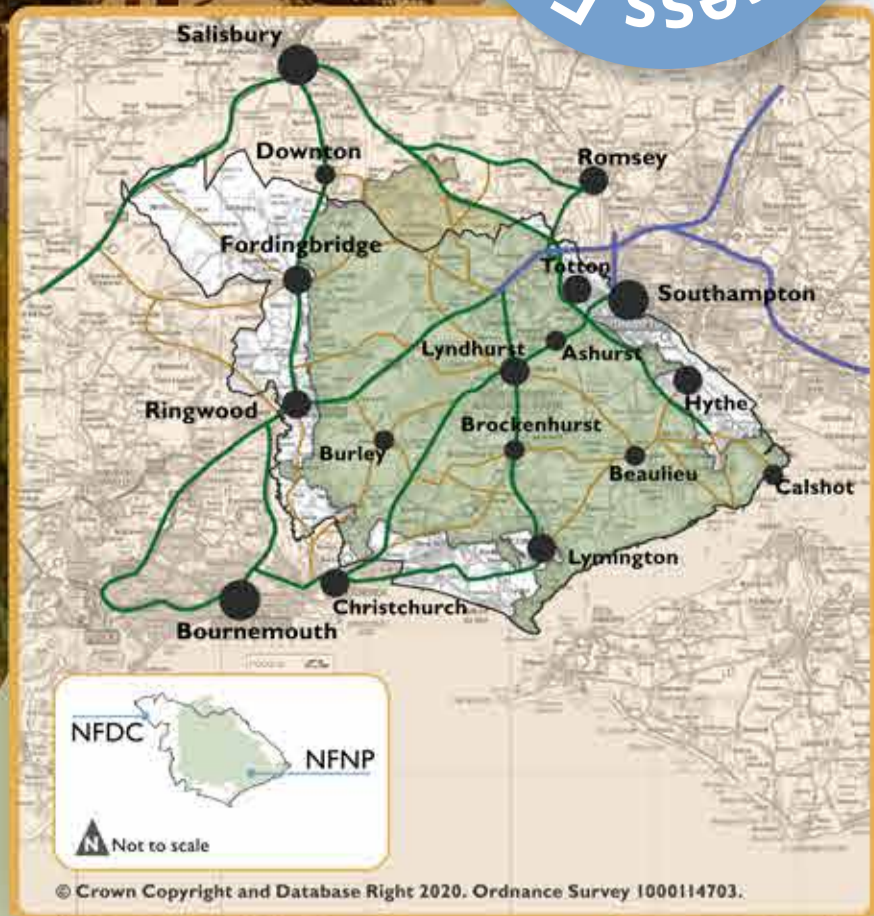


July 2020



Advising on how to make the New Forest countryside more accessible

We are an independent, advisory body, operating on a statutory basis. Our appointing authorities are Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority.



Giving Advice

Section 94 of the CROW Act makes it the statutory function of forums to give advice to a variety of government departments including:

Our appointing authorities, Local councils, Natural England, Forestry England, English Heritage and various other Government Department. All of these bodies are required, under section 94(5) of the CROW Act, to "have regard, in carrying out their functions, to any relevant advice given to them" by a forum.

Public Access to Meetings

We have four meetings a year, two of which are at various places in the national park and the other two are held at the New Forest National Park Authority headquarters at Lymington Town Hall.

All forum meetings are open to the public. Please bear in mind that only LAF members can participate in discussions.

If you wish to make a representation to the forum then please submit it in writing to the Forum Support Officer two weeks before the meeting date (you will have a maximum of five minutes). All representations will be at the discretion of the chair.

Word from the Chair, consultations and site visits

During the year we have welcomed 3 new LAF members, representing farming, landowning & conservation and estate management.

The Covid-19 situation has slowed the progress of our work. However we twice responded to The CROW access consultations on the Bickerley Common, Ringwood and were successful in extending the time in which access is permitted. We have continued to take an interest in improving access particularly in connection with:

- SANGS, the provision of alternative natural green space for recreation purposes close to areas where new housing is being built and hope to increase our influence on mitigation strategies,
- The Direction and scope of the HCC Countryside Service,
- The development of the Fawley Power Station site where we wish to increase the provision of rights of way and green space.

Ruth Croker, Chair of the Local Access Forum



Consultations

The forum regularly responds to various consultations from many different organisations including:

- The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
- The New Forest National Park Authority,
- Hampshire and Wiltshire County Councils,
- Local Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Open Access Land at Bickerley Common

NE Consultation

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.

Fawley Waterside Development

Planning Consultation

We collected various comments from our members relating to the public access provision of this scheme and fed them into the planning process.

Waterside Cycling Action Group

Informal Consultation

We responded to a letter from the Waterside Cycling Action Group raising concerns about the proposed developments to the A326/B3053.

Calshot & Fawley Site Visit

Gordon Garrett, Countryside Access Representative, New Forest Access Forum

Members walked along the newly dedicated footpath to where the Fawley Waterside Development will occur. This will also be the line of the England Coast Path and the current timescales were discussed.

Hoburne Bashley Site Visit

Paul Brockman, Youth & Education Representative, New Forest Access Forum

Paul and Simon introduced the site and discussed the importance of young people accessing woods and wild places. Following the site visit the Forum acknowledged the work done by education professionals across the National Park and agreed on the importance of young people accessing the countryside.

Discussion Topics

Enhancing New Forest Rights of Way

Adam Vasey, Access Ranger, New Forest National Park Authority

Adam explained that the National Park is looking to reinforce the special qualities of the National Park by enhancing the rights of way network. Photos were presented of the current signage in the Forest and how the new signs could possibly look.

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative

Adam Vasey, Access Ranger, New Forest National Park Authority

Adam reported that Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding from the National Grid was available to reduce negative impacts from the High Voltage powerlines. A future project to improve the rights of way along the waterside area is now being considered.

SANGS; Public access through the planning framework

David Illsley, Policy Manager, New Forest National Park Authority

David gave information about Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces, what public access rights this creates, how these are enforced and the long-term implications for upkeep and maintenance.

Commoning and carriage driving

Suzanne Kempe, New Forest Commoner

Suzanne 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. Ms Kempe pointed members to the educational value of the recently updated Verderers and CDA websites.

Equestrians in Hampshire

Gail Johnson, Hampshire Countryside Access Forum

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.

The future direction and scope of the HCC Countryside Service.

Cllr Edward Heron, New Forest District Council

Councillor Edward Heron emphasised the necessity of balancing increased access to the National Park against the realities of budgetary constraints which are putting funding for services such as rights of way improvement works and parish lengths men under threat.

The role of the BHS in the New Forest

Petronella Natrass, British Horse National Park Field Officer – South Region

Petronella explained 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.

Project updates, training and workshops

Cycle Working Group update

Mark Cowling, Cycling Representative, New Forest Access Forum

Mark Cowling updated the Forum on work to identify gaps in the cycling network. Work is ongoing but 16 sections have been identified for further visits by members of the group to identify if they are viable routes worth taking forward to the RMS.

Historic Routes and Past Pathways project update

Gareth Owen, Interpretation and Outreach Officer, New Forest National Park Authority

Gareth Owen presented an update on the project work to date; and the aim of the project is to find five potential new self-guided walking trails using existing ROW. With the aim to use old routes and tap into the history and stories connected with that route.

Future Workstream workshop

Adam Vasey, Access Ranger, New Forest National Park Authority

We ran a workshop and discussion which gave a chance to discuss our future yearly priorities, feedback on the annual report, uses for the website and the potential for more public engagement at Quadrant meetings and other events.

The Recreation Management Strategy; an overview and update

Nigel Matthews, Head of recreation management and learning, New Forest National Park Authority

Nigel presented an update on the New Forest Recreation Management strategy drawing comparisons with the findings of the Glover Report and pointing to the newly agreed approach being supported by multiple organisations. The full 22 actions arising out of the strategy are on the 'Future Forest' website.

The history and role of local access forums

Adam Vasey, Access Ranger, New Forest National Park Authority

Over the past two years we have gained six new members. We took this opportunity to remind and refresh the entire forum on the role of Local Access Forums in the UK and, more specifically, what the Access Forum can achieve here in the New Forest.

Access update from the Isle of Wight

Mark Earp, Chair of the Isle of Wight Access Forum

Mark gave an overview of the broad range of work engaged in by the IoW Access Forum including: the possible creation of 'no go' areas for certain groups, the problems and risks posed by electronic motored transport such as Segways and e-scooters on the island, obstacles to the Coastal Path, and the RADAR key scheme for disabled toilets and gates.

Looking Forward

Our priorities for the year ahead are;

Continuing to provide both formal and informal advice and guidance on countryside access to New Forest groups and organisations.

Improve our website and other avenues of education and information provision.

To find safe working practices and continue the work of the access forum in the face of the COVID19 threat.

Focus on accessibility

Accessibility for those with additional needs is at the heart of what we do as an access forum. Here are some of our achievements.

- Ann Sevier (Vice Chair, New Forest Access Forum) test-drove a category three electric scooter off-road during both site visits. She commented that the mobility scooter was difficult to maneuver on loose gravel and found that it required a very tight grip on the handlebars which may not be suitable for all.
- The Access forum provided mapping information, previously gathered, so that six accessible walks could be rebranded and linked to the 'Miles without stiles' project. These are now all available on the NFNPA website.
- The National Park are working with Open Sight Eastleigh to identify what we do well and what we can improve for people with visual impairments. We had five days of visits and workshops and learned a huge amount, especially how technology can assist those with additional needs. In light of these workshops we have made our main website and the walking app more accessible.

Our Members

Forum members represent a wide range of relevant interests and expertise. Members are selected in an individual capacity to represent a particular interest. They do not represent any specific organisation or group. Forum members should recognise the validity of the views of others and work together to achieve consensus.

Members of LAFs are volunteers and include a range of people from the local community, including:

- land owners and land managers
- access users such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders
- those representing other interests, such as health and conservation

Members are equally appointed for a three year term. Members are unpaid, although reasonable travel expenses and a carer's allowance may be claimed for attending meetings and training events.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the New Forest Access Forum then please contact the Forum Support Officer.



Forum member - Representing

- Gary North – Commoning
- Ann Sevier – Public land management
- Ruth Croker – Walking
- Gordon Garrett – General recreation
- Heather Gould – Dog walking
- Mark Cowling – Cycling
- Alastair Duncan – Volunteering and conservation
- Peter Scott – Coastal access
- Ross Mitchell – Health & wellbeing
- Paul Carpenter – Youth and education
- Fran Brockman – Hampshire County Council
- Jacqueline England – Tourism
- Leo Randall – New Forest National Park Authority
- Jane Horton – Equestrian
- Henry Mellor – Disability
- Richard Shirley – Estate management
- Richard Manley – Farming
- Julian Sheppard – Landowning & conservation

If you would like the New Forest Access Forum to consult on your organisation's access plans then please contact the Forum Support Officer



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