

Minutes of the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum meeting, 12th September 2017

Present

Members

Robin Edwards (RE)
Graham Flatt (GJ)
Gail Johnson (GJ)
Alan Marlow (AM)
Jim Morey (JM)
Gill Plumbley (GP)
Alan Taylor (Vice-chair) (AT)
Isaac Walker
Aileen Wood (AW)
Andy Whincup (AWH)
Rachael Bryan (RB) (Chair)
Cllr Edward Heron (Cllr EH)
Lindsay Marshall (LM)

Officers attending all or part of meeting

Petronella Nattrass (HCC Forum Officer)
(PN)
Jonathan Woods (HCC) (JW)
Kim Dawkins (HCC Admin Assistant)
James Emmett (HCC Countryside Access
Manager)
Sam Jones (HCC Countryside Access
Manager)
Graham Wright (HCC Strategic Transport
Team Leader)

Observers

Helena Barker (West Berkshire LAF)

1 Apologies, welcome and introductions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Melanie Fortescue, Lyell Fairlie, Nigel Wolstenholme, Paul Knipe and Sue Coles.

2 Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 **Minutes:** Amendments to page 4, para 7.2 should read "...to be made on one of the 'Top Three' routes... and 7.6 "The group discussed the status of the firing range on the South Downs Way...". Subject to these agreed amendments, the draft minutes were approved as a true record.
- 2.2 **Matters arising:** all had either been completed or would be covered later in the Agenda, other than
- **Multi-user routes** – sub-group has yet to meet, possible report to December meeting.

3 Byways Management (*James Emmett, Countryside Access Manager Central East*)

- 3.1 JE outlined the assessment form on which HCC is proposing to record conditions of Byways and asked if Countryside Officers should make the assessment, or whether a sub-group of the Forum should assist. Training would be arranged to ensure assessments are consistent.
- 3.2 MF (representing motorised users) had emailed supporting the general approach but feels that the three stages outlined in JN's paper should have timescales associated with them; also, that the impact of different classes of users should be explored.

3.3 The forum raised the following points:

- Timescales/follow-up is essential.
- What is the parish councils' role in this task, and how will they be involved?
- The form needs to record the width of the path not just the length, the path's current ease of use, how well waymarked it is, the nature of the damage and the significance of the route within the wider network.
- Being a BOAT, assessment needs to be clear what the impacts are for all classes of user. Standards will need to be developed for all user perspectives.
- Any results that are in the red are of high priority and need resolving with immediate effect. One body needs to take control and complete the works.
- Can the forms have more detail within the lights system, to support/justify the basis for a particular grading?
- Some concern about 'pointing a finger' at particular user groups.
- Is the intention to achieve 'good' condition or 'stable/sustainable condition'? JE replied that the objective is to maintain BOATs in sustainable/useable condition, e.g. winter closures would provide for 'resting' the routes during adverse weather.
- Assessment needs to be carried out by the area teams, but workload could be reduced by asking parish councils and users to prioritise routes for assessment.
- Some concern about fixed criteria – impacts can be variable, e.g. a large sinkhole within a small stretch of path makes the whole route unusable. It is important to include comments/observations in the assessment.
- May need to break paths down into smaller sections - possibility to have a small diversion, taking the route around the affected area.
- Clear communication essential so users can understand why this is happening, particularly where voluntary restrictions involved.
- Are HCC discussing these ideas with Highways?

ACTION: Forum agreed to form a Byways sub-group, members to include: Gail Johnson, Aileen Wood, Gill Plumbley, Andy Whincup and Jim Morey. Melanie Fortescue and Sue Coles were also proposed in their absence.

4 Report on National LAF Conference on 21 June (*Rachael Bryan*)

- 4.1 As per written report. It had been disappointing that the proposed workshop on Brexit had been replaced with a more general discussion about Opportunities for Public Access. In regard to the workshop on Multi-user Routes, it was noted that the BHS are involved in the current project, as well as Cycling UK and The Ramblers.
- 4.2 There had been no mention at the Conference of the House of Lords Select Committee call for evidence in regard to the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act. (**Subsequent note from PN:** *This will have been because the Select Committee was appointed after the LAF Conference, on 29 June. The call for evidence was not launched until 19 July.*)

ACTION: PN to draft a letter to the House of Lords Select Committee to ask why the call for evidence had not been more widely promoted.

5 Portsmouth Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

5.1 The Forum had the following comments in response to the questions within the initial consultation:

(1) Main barriers relating to existing RoW in Portsmouth

- Lack of connectivity between central Portsmouth and the rights of way around the coastline.
- Parking restrictions - either time-limited or all paid for, puts limits on walkers.
- There are local bus services to public Hards but limited services along the sea front and few stops for people to access the coast.
- Portsmouth is quite isolated from the rest of Hampshire, better links to the wider area needed for non-motorised users.

(2) Main opportunities

- Public health issues within the city - need to encourage residents of Portsmouth to use the ROW.
- Publicity around opening of England Coast Path would be a good opportunity for promoting use of the network.

(3) Top 3 priorities

- Encouraging use of the network.
- East-west connectivity – using other routes as well as RoW.
- Promoting health benefits of using RoW through GPs and other Health professionals.

(4) Other comments

- Design of street furniture needs to consider all accessibility needs including wheelchair users/prams.
- Clear, accessible connections to key sites, e.g. Alver Valley Many barriers to use – RoW end at dual carriageway or at the coast, there is also a lot of traffic. Roads and footways will need to be included to create a usable network.

ACTION: PN to draft a formal response and circulate to Forum for comment before sending to Portsmouth on 14 September.

6 Bracknell Forest ROWIP

6.1 The Forum agreed the following comments in response to this consultation:

- Bracknell Forest should be commended for a positive document.
- It is good that the ROWIP recognises cross-border linkages and especially Blackwater Valley Path, which is a particular focus of shared interest with Hampshire.
- The Forum feels it is important to maintain cross-boundary communication between authorities – main concerns are that the cross boundary working is of the same standards.

ACTION: PN to draft response and circulate to Forum for comment. Consultation deadline is 4 October.

7 England Coastal Path (ECP)

- 7.1 Correction needed to report for Item 7 – the current consultation is on the stretch of the ECP between Portsmouth and South Hayling, not Emsworth.
- 7.2 The Forum approved the draft responses prepared by AM with one amendment, to include safety concerns about including Langstone Harbour mudflats within spreading room (indicated by the magenta wash).

ACTION: PN to submit under HCAFs name, after highlighting safety issue at Langstone Harbour.

8 Forum Officers Report

- 8.1 The written report was largely taken as read. PN added a verbal update on re-recruitment to the Forum, thanking those members who had agreed to stand for a further 3-year term to September 2020. The closing date for new applications (which are being sought particularly for additional Landowner and Health representatives) is 25 September.
- 8.2 The report highlighted a number of consultations and JM flagged that Gosport Borough Council were also consulting on the SPD for the Town Centre and Waterside. The Forum discussed their capacity to respond and the lack of knowledge many of them have of the area. There will be many more consultations in the future and JW reminded the Forum of the opportunity to put forward generic guidance. Members felt that responses should be made where they can add value and avoid 'stating the obvious'.
- 8.3 The Forum considered whether to reply to the **Portsmouth Local Plan Review consultation** and agreed a response should be sent stating that while HCAF has no comment at this stage, the Forum wishes to remain on the consultation list.

ACTION: PN to draft a response and circulate to the Planning Sub-Group for approval in time to submit by 28 September.

9 Project/Sub-Group updates

- 9.1 **MoD Liaison Group** – has not met since the last Forum meeting, due to meet at Longmoor Camp. GF to contact Mark Ludlow and confirm meeting date.

ACTION: GF to coordinate next meeting.

- 9.2 **List of Streets** – the Forum discussed Karen Murray's letter, which confirmed HCC's support in principle for the project as outlined but also flagged the need to understand any resource implications for HCC.

Forum agreed that the sub-group should meet and agree the next stage in progressing the desk-based study.

ACTION: List of Streets sub-group to meet and agree how to progress the review of 'T' roads.

ACTION: PN to meet with Karen Murray and discuss the project further, once the sub-group has completed the initial study.

- 9.3 **Planning sub-group** – has received replies from a number of local planning authorities to the Forum’s letter of 15 June and asked PN to set up meetings with those that have responded. The Forum is particularly keen to find a way of ensuring that planning criteria are met and enforced.

ACTION: PN to arrange meetings with local planning authorities.

- 9.4 The group had met twice since the last Forum meeting, the second meeting being with Owen Devine and Ben Marsh, the two Countryside Planning officers. Owen had advised that guidance on provision for all non-motorised users would be helpful.

- 9.5 **Equestrian Guidance** – GJ and GP have edited the draft down to 4 sides, JW and PN have suggested that graphics are now needed to give it more impact. Despite Owen Devine’s suggestion for a single document for all non-motorised users, GJ feels from an equestrian viewpoint there should be a separate document relating to equestrians, ideally endorsed by the British Horse Society and Hampshire Countryside Service.

10 Hampshire Highways (Graham Wright, Strategic Transport Team Leader)

- 10.1 Graham Wright outlined roles and responsibilities within Highways. His department (Economy, Transport and Environment) has to find a further £19million cost saving by 2019. This will be challenging, given the extent of cuts made to date.

- 10.2 **Hampshire Walking and Cycling Strategies** – these are fairly high level, aspirational documents which are intended to be delivered in partnership with local district councils who best know local requirements, Much of HCC’s funding for transport schemes comes from the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) rather than directly from central Government. HCC competes with many other organisations for this funding and therefore has to make bids that relate to LEP priorities, primarily housing and jobs.

Local Transport Plan (integrated transport funding) is largely spent on road safety and local match funding to make any bids to LEPs and the Department for Transport cost-effective. HCC always includes utility walking and cycling in local highway schemes.

- 10.3 **Utility vs. recreation** – the Forum questioned the focus on utility routes and asked whether there was no priority given to recreational routes for health and wellbeing. GW agreed that while these are relevant concerns they cannot be delivered without funding.

EH confirmed that where resources are limited, utility will take precedence over recreation, though there should be some scope to acknowledge that e.g. short links to recreational routes/facilities are ‘utility’, and must be recognised as such.

From a Highways perspective, ‘utility’ routes provide a means of access between where people live and work, in order to ‘keep the wheels of the county moving’. The basis for funding is user benefit, and the greatest proportion goes to car users.

- 10.4 **Safety** is a priority and HCC will not implement a scheme that is unsafe for users. GJ commented that in regard to the safety of a new road all road users have a right to be considered. It is within the power of HCC to make off-road provision for equestrians, and there are opportunities to make a difference without cost. GW agreed that there had been examples that demonstrated that better outcomes could have been achieved if relevant stakeholders had been consulted and involved at an earlier stage. HCAF and the organisations represented within the Forum could help in this respect to establish a better way of working.
- 10.5 **Next steps** – GW would be happy to work with HCAF on the basis of improving the efficiency of engagement so that the Forum can better understand where the ‘early stages’ are in terms of planning road improvement schemes and communicate what could be done. This will require an improved relationship between Highways and HCAF with the aim of reducing risks to highway improvement projects and achieving an outcome that is appropriate to the needs of all road users.
- 10.6 The Forum and Graham Wright agreed to hold a workshop before the next HCAF meeting in December to develop better understanding of (1) constraints and (2) opportunities for HCAF and Hampshire Highways to work together.

ACTION: GW and PN to liaise and develop a Workshop for Highways officers and HCAF members before 12 December.

11 Reports from other LAFS

- 11.1 Aileen Wood had attended the New Forest, South Downs and Surrey LAF meetings and submitted a written report of each.

Helena Barker reported that West Berkshire LAF had met on 17 May and discussed the West Berkshire ROWIP and Network Rail’s proposals for/closure of railway footpath crossings. The WBLAF has also written to MPs about Brexit and HB agreed to share a copy of the letter. The next meeting will be later in September.

ACTION: Helen Barker, Petronella Natrass to liaise re letter about Brexit.

The meeting closed at 13.00 hrs

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 12 December 2017 (AGM – Winchester)