



AGM Annual Report – April 2025/March 2026

Despite being a difficult year for HCAF to conduct its duties as a statutory body, the Chair would like to thank Members for their continued support and determination to maintain the Forum's momentum and pro-active engagement with Hampshire County Council. In particular, I would like to thank Lindsey Marshall who has stepped down as a landowner representative for over 10 years of valuable service to the Forum.

In early 2025 the Forum was advised by HCC that it would be reducing Officer Support to the Forum from four meetings to two statutory meetings per year due to resource issues. Although this was initially viewed as a serious setback to HCAF, members were determined to maintain the momentum of holding four formal meetings a year. The result has been that members have been motivated to discuss matters more robustly in non-supported meetings pro-actively identifying issues where HCAF guidance could be of benefit to Countryside Service. Despite the reduction in Officer supported meetings, Countryside Service team members continued to provide essential operational assistance to the Forum. The Team's support throughout the 12 month period is valued and appreciated.

The main topics Forum Members debated and advised upon during the 12 month period from April 2025 to April 2026 included:

Reduction in Officer Support – following the announcement to reduce Officer Supported meetings, HCAF members met to discuss the implications and how to remain an effective voice. It identified a number of questions/points/concerns to Countryside Service which were addressed by Jonathan Woods. One of the problems that has arisen has been the delay in identified action points being reported on.

CAP – the Forum provided its comments to Countryside Service CAP Review 2025-2035. The Forum congratulated CS on producing what it considers to be a valuable document. It was agreed that HCC would provide an annual update to the Forum about progress made against objectives.

ORPAs – following the successful conclusion of a project that commenced in 2018 where the walking representative had identified 125 routes on the OS map without any indication of public rights, HCC Highways in February 2025 confirmed that through its liaison with OS 32 of these routes had been added to the map. It was also confirmed by Highways that they would not be undertaking any maintenance on ORPAs unless there was a major issue, but insured volunteer groups could undertake vegetation cutback on unmetalled tracks. A published paper on this subject is on the HCAF website

Byways – the Forum contributed to Countryside Service's draft policy on byways. At the end of 2025 HCC decided to postpone agreeing this policy. The Forum hopes to hear more news about this in matter in 2026.

Active Travel – a paper was drafted and agreed by the Forum on Active Travel in Hampshire. This paper will be published in due course once a meeting has taken place with HCC’s AT team in July 2026.

Surfaces – the Forum was requested by HCC to provide its advice on surfaces. A paper was drafted, agreed and published on the HCAF website.

Land Owner Representative – Andrew Shirvell stepped down as a landowner representative on HCAF in April 2025. The Chair would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his valuable support. Countryside Service undertook a process to advertise for a replacement.

Accessibility – a sub-group has now been formed and met. It will report again to the Forum in October 2026.

Path Management project – climate change is having an impact on PRow across the county due to heavier rain fall as well as drought conditions. The Forum has discussed whether current maintenance/drainage construction specifications require reviewing and, if so, could the Forum be of assistance to HCC. This is a long-term project and is currently in its infancy.

Local Government Reorganisation – The Forum continues to welcome updates from Countryside Service. It is concerned about the continuity of the Service across the county and the work of the Definitive Maps team. There is also a concern about how the LAFs will continue to operate.

Mayoral letter – Representatives of HCAF, the South Downs and New Forest LAFs have met to discuss a response to LGR and other ways of working together to have a stronger voice. The first project has been to draft and agree a letter to be sent to the Mayoral candidates and the Heads of the Unitary Authorities to raise the profile of the LAFs and what they have to offer; the importance of access to the countryside; how the Mayor and Unitary Authorities can help; and the importance of providing the continuity of Countryside Service across the county.

Countryside Code – the Forum responded to the consultation on the Countryside Code.

ATE Rural Guidance consultation – following HCAF’s offer to assist with the response to this consultation, Hampshire Highways confirmed that it had responded, but was not in a position to share its comments with the Forum.

Planning – the Forum continues to express its concern about the need for improved engagement between HCAF and the Planners (both development and road infrastructure) to ensure that opportunities are not missed to create better connectivity of the PRow network particularly in areas where it has become fragmented.

The Chair would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Countryside Service Team for their hard work, dedication and help to the Forum.

Gail Johnson
Chair
Hampshire Countryside Access Forum
June 2026