

# Local Access Forum News

...for the south east region

## A note from the editor...

*Thank you to all for your contributions—a huge amount of good work is obviously going on!*

*Many of you will be aware that Natural England and Defra are currently looking to make substantial savings; more news will be available following the findings of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review, expected in October.*

*In the meantime, please don't forget that part of your role as a LAF in these prudent times may be to ensure that decision makers in your appointing authority are well aware of the high value placed on the rights of way & access network by residents....and its contribution to the health and sustainable transport agendas!*

## LAF round-up:

### Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

*Peter Brown, Chairman*

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It is our practice to hold our meetings at different venues around the County; in April we were in the "far east" at Burgess Hill. After the formal business, we were taken on a most interesting walk around the outskirts of the town to inspect part of the Green Circle Project. Some years ago the local authority - Mid Sussex District Council - wished to relate the rapidly expanding town to the surrounding countryside. As the development plan was developed, land was acquired and allocated to establish not just a ring road, but also a series of interconnecting routes for walkers and cyclists through green spaces, some of which are managed as local nature reserves. This

excellent approach should prevent continuous sprawl of development and, most importantly from our viewpoint, should ensure that there is a comprehensive network of paths connecting communities to each other and the surrounding countryside. We commend this approach to others.

CAFWS is viewing with concern the anticipated cutbacks in expenditure in the public sector. Already we hear of projects with which we have been closely involved through the consultation process, shelved indefinitely. It will be even more important for us to work in partnerships if the Rights of Way Improvement Plan is going to have a worthwhile Action Plan. At the same time, the Coalition Government seems keen to involve communities and volunteers - this may be a new opportunity. Watch this space.

Sixty percent of West Sussex was designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Chichester Harbour, the Downs and the High Weald. All three have come to meetings to report on their approach to countryside access - all very different approaches. The South Downs has now been designated as the latest National Park and, naturally, that has raised a raft of issues that need to be



CAFWS looking at the green circle project

addressed; it has thrown up the apparent anomaly that the National Park Authority will be planning and access authority but the County Council will be Highway Authority and therefore responsible for management of public rights of way. The importance of maintaining high standards and ensuring future cooperation and good communications is a great concern of the Forum.

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## Bracknell Forest LAF – Neighbouring LAFs meet up for a cross-boundary network walk

*Graham Pockett, Officer*

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On 25<sup>th</sup> May, the Local Access Forums of Bracknell Forest Council and The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead met up for an evening walk to look to byways, bridleway and footpaths along the borough's boundary.

The initiative had been discussed by both forums last year after Graham Pockett of Bracknell Forest Council suggested it, and was put on the agenda for this year once the evenings were light enough. Officers from the two authorities liaised about the date, meeting point, route and suggested topics for discussion, and a map was prepared and circulated to all members and officers.

On the northern boundary of Bracknell Forest and the southern boundary of Windsor & Maidenhead there are a number of bridlepaths, byways and footpaths that cross the boundary. One byway runs along the boundary, and this is an important area for horse riders with good connections to an extensive network away from trafficked roads.

Among the topics discussed at various points along the walk were a new timber surfacing material that Windsor and Maidenhead intend to trial on a section of bridlepath; whether there should be signage on rights of way when they cross from one authority area into another; arrangements for maintaining paths on boundaries; how a new bridlepath was created using a combination of highway verge and private land; naming of lanes with signs and comparisons in the way the two Forums operate.

We agreed that Bracknell Forest would also monitor the surface material trial, and we now intend to install waymarker discs with clear identification of which authority is responsible for the right of way.



It was a great opportunity for officers and members from two boroughs to meet up and find out about each other, and will help to cement working arrangements in the future. One member of the Bracknell Forest Forum lived close to the route and generously provided liquid refreshments at the end of the walk.

The weather was perfect, and all agreed it was a very worthwhile and enjoyable evening. The intention is that this cross-boundary type event should be repeated with other neighbouring Local Access Forums, and this also runs parallel to the appointing of observers to attend other LAF meetings, which was initiated by Mid & West Berkshire LAF. Increasing liaison can only strengthen the regional representation and lead to improved networks and more co-operation over mutual maintenance arrangements and signage, to the benefit of all users of the rights of way network.

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## Surrey Countryside Access Forum

*Andrew Saint, Officer*

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The Surrey Countryside Access Forum has only met once since the last edition of this newsletter. In that time they have responded to a number of consultations, including two concerning the restriction of public access to areas of open access land. The Forum has also spent a considerable amount of time developing a model specification for gates. Earlier in the year they

met to discuss the problems that gates could cause to all types of users and how certain designs can overcome these problems; a sub-group continues to investigate these issues. Once a model specification has been agreed the Forum intend to recommend it to those who are responsible for gates on land to which the public have access. Other matters in which the Forum have taken an interest include Surrey's proposed 'spine network' (a series of rights of way which will be promoted and signed to a higher standard than other parts of the network) and the final report of the Rights of Way Stakeholder Group.

Like many other Forums in the south east, over the coming weeks Surrey will be producing an 'ideal access plan' for an area of Forestry Commission owned woodland within the county. The Forum also intend to review the adequacy of the current road traffic signs both in terms of the types of signage available and their positioning on the network.

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## Hampshire Countryside Access Forum

*Amanda Hull, Officer*

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It has been a busy six months for the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum, with three full meetings held since January, and no shortage of consultations, including coastal access, Gating Orders and access land restrictions, to name but a few. The Forum are now focusing their attention towards the most recent consultation, this follows a useful presentation at the July meeting of the Forum, about the new LTP3.

The Forum continue to support Hampshire County Council implement their CAPs (RoWIPs), with Forum members actively involved in each of the CAP working groups. The Forum has also advised on the successes and failures of these working groups, keen to ensure steady progress is made and real improvements to public access are seen on the ground.

Following a successful pilot in 2008, a sub-group to the Forum has been successful in securing Heritage Lottery Funding to run a new project, Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage (PATHH). More than 100 volunteers of all ages, from school children to senior citizens, will have the opportunity to investigate the history of their local area using original maps and documents. By

delving into these historic records, volunteers will gather information about gaps in today's network to meet modern needs, as identified through the CAPs. The Steering Committee, comprising members of HCAF and the New Forest Access Forum are now employing a contractor to take this two year project forward.

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## Slough Local Access Forum

*Jacqui Wheeler, Officer*

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Though the Slough LAF operates within a small urban authority area there always seems to be plenty to discuss on the agenda.

A Gating Order Process was tabled at the last meeting and with LAF approval sent to delegated officers for acceptance as official policy. It is hoped this will establish a consistent method of dealing with any future proposals; with a Gating Order Panel making recommendations to delegated officers based on all the evidence. The Gating Order Panel would consist of representatives from the LAF, Highways Dept, Legal Dept., Community Safety and the Police.

Members were recently consulted on the Council's new cycling strategy and the LAF is pushing to be effectively consulted on relevant planning applications at a point in the process that would allow recommendations to be taken on board.

Membership at Slough is down, but not out. Hopefully this situation will be rectified in the coming months.



*Out and about on an accessibility audit: Slough LAF and the Evergreen Trust*



## Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum

*Hugo Blomfield, Officer*

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LAF members are considering the various implications of the new South Downs National Park, particularly the opportunities for Brighton & Hove and the work of the current LAF.

The LAF is represented on the Local Strategic Partnership – through the Transport Partnership – to help ensure walking and riding access has a voice in the city.

Members have also met to review progress of implementing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and particularly the opening up of Missing Links in and around the city.

An on-site visit was made to the Undercliff path in advance of members reaching a decision on the issue of cycling along the route.



*Brighton & Hove LAF consider cycle use of the Undercliff path*

## East Sussex Local Access Forum

*Tim Squire, Officer*

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Before the June meeting members were given a tour of Pebsham Countryside Park. This is an area of land being developed for recreation on and around a soon to close landfill site between Bexhill and Hastings. At the meeting members received a presentation on Pebsham Countryside Park outlining the vision, aims, rationale and development. It was explained that its title has been chosen to show that it departs from the 1969 definition of a Country Park as not all the land within is owned by the local authority. Members discussed how best to consult on the development of the park with the local landowner interest and the users.

In addition to the regional work going on to engage with the Forestry Commission on equestrian access, ESLAF has had local concerns raised about the sale of land by the Forestry Commission. The result of this may well be the loss of permissive access under new ownership regimes. The LAF agreed that it would be of great benefit to be forewarned of any sale of land so there could be an opportunity to negotiate the continuation of any permissive access.

At the March meeting members discussed the pros and cons of whether the council should delegate its duties regarding maintenance of rights of way to the new National Park Authority. Currently the South Downs Joint Committee carry out some of the duties on behalf of ESCC. Some thought it would be best if these duties were passed to the National Park but some thought it would be more efficient if the council took back the duties currently carried out by the Joint Committee and do all the rights of way functions ourselves as we do across the rest of the county. Since it was not clear at the time what the new National Park Authority might be looking to do the ESLAF urged the council to delay any decision until a clearer vision for the NP emerged. The council is now due to make a decision on these matters in July.

## Mid & West Berkshire Local Access Forum

*Cllr Dr Tony Vickers, Member*

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The Mid & West Berks LAF is unusual in having three 'appointing authorities': Reading Borough, West Berkshire District and Wokingham Borough Council. Each has very different challenges: West Berks is 75% AONB; Wokingham has substantial Green Belt areas and busy main roads; Reading has almost no countryside. The LAF recently dropped the 'C' from its name and at its last meeting this May was told that another Berkshire LAF includes urban play areas within its remit.

We celebrated the publication of the third and final RoWIP of our three Authorities by holding a special one-off 'community engagement' meeting on a sunny Wednesday evening in early June at the lakeside Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre. 23 non-members of our LAF, mainly from parish and town councils – but including some landowners and several horse-riders – attended the event, which was judged to have been a success and may be repeated annually. Subjects covered included 'duties and powers of local councils', 'Section 106 and other funding', 'the landowners perspective', and 'publicising rights of way - from the users' perspective'. Brief introductions by members of the LAF were followed by an excellent finger buffet and workshops on these topics.

West Berkshire's Rights of Way Section Head Elaine Cox, who has been involved with her own parish's Parish Plan, concurred with the Parish Plans Officer from Community Council Berkshire Sarah Ward – who supported the event – that the



*The author watches Mid & West Berks LAF member, equestrian Dr Janice Bridger present to the meeting*

potential for local communities to play a crucial role in implementing RoWIPs could not be underestimated. West Berkshire is a Beacon Council in the preparation of Parish Plans – and Sarah says that almost every one includes strong support for improved rights of way. It was the same people who helped with Parish Plans that the LAF was targeting, as a vital resource to tap into. West Berks' RoWIP highlights this.

Many useful ideas were presented by participants, both in the workshops and in feedback forms, which the Working Group are now analysing before the next LAF meeting in September. In particular, the matter of a LAF website continues to exercise us, especially because we do not have a single Authority to act as its host.

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## Medway Local Access Forum

*Rita Hunt, Chair*

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The Medway LAF has been very busy since our last update.

The leaflet we mentioned previously is due to be available online on the Medway Council website and on our own website –

[www.medwaylafs.webs.com](http://www.medwaylafs.webs.com).

Changes have been made to those Councillors who sit on the Forum and there has already been much better attendance and we look forward to a much better relationship.



*Mid & West Berks LAF engage with the community!*

We have made major strides with the Planning Department and look forward to being consulted at an earlier stage in the proceedings. There are several major developments taking place in Medway at the moment and the Medway LAF are being included in the consultation process.

The Valley of Visions project has really taken off in Medway and work is nearly complete on the Strood and Cuxton Community Trails which are due to have official openings in the coming months. Thank you to our PROW Officers who have been very helpful with information on the Community Trail.

Medway Council has refurbished a bridleway using recycled tyres for the surface which has proved to be very popular – ticking several environmental boxes along the way!

Members of the Forum have also visited Medway Council's Archives and spent a very interesting morning looking at many old maps showing footpaths that are still here today, although many have now been built around.

We welcome Cllr Michael Dale who represents St James of Grain Parish Council and replaces Cllr Sylvia Edwards. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Sylvia for her previous attendance and support.

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## New Forest Access Forum

*Sarah Manchester, Officer*

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There have been some changes in membership with new members from both appointing authorities joining, along with representatives for Access to Water and Land Management.

It has been another busy six months in the New Forest with an extra meeting called in addition to the two regular meetings. The Forum has responded to three formal consultations: the NE and Defra consultations relating to the new Coastal Access provisions, and a consultation on the final draft of the National Park's Recreation Management Strategy. Forum members have also commented on a number of parish-based transport scheme proposals from the District Council which will be used to inform the utilisation of developer contributions.

The Forum has received a large number of

consultations over the last year or so. Consultations can vary greatly in their timing, relevance and perceived importance. In order that it can respond as effectively as possible, the Forum is in the process of agreeing a procedure for responding to consultations.

The main topics on the agenda at each of the two regular Forum meetings have been varied, with one meeting receiving a presentment from a member of the public on a contentious 'single path' issue, and the other being informed about the upcoming new Local Transport Plan by the Transport Policy officer from the highway authority.

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## Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum

*Jonathan Clark, Officer*

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The Buckinghamshire LAF have recruited a new disabled rambler, who actively participates in the organised rambling events around the country. His disability relates to a horse riding accident, so he also has experience in other aspects of rights of way.

This takes membership up to 12, with the possibility of additional representation from the newly formed 'Community Impact Bucks', who have good experience sourcing local funding for projects on behalf of parish councils and local organisations. It is hoped to use their knowledge to channel more funding towards rights of way in the county.

The LAF will be monitoring progress towards the council securing better developer contributions in order to improve public access around the major development areas of Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. In addition, great strides forward have been made by volunteers surveying the current state of open access in the county and the forum will be deciding on the next steps towards improving access onto and around these sites.

Finally, the often thorny issue of dogs disrupting the well-being of sheep and cattle on public rights of way will be addressed, with a decision on suitable signing.

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