

NEW FOREST ACCESS FORUM

Meeting: *Monday 07 December 2015*

Agenda item 9: *Regular updates*

a) HCC Countryside Access – *verbal report from Sam Jones, Area Manager South and West Hants*

b) National Park Authority –*report from Mark Holroyd*

Walking Festival success and winter guided experiences

More than 1000 people participated in our annual walking festival between 17th October and 1st November. Unlike many other walking festivals, walkers in the New Forest were rewarded with discounted tickets if they left their car behind and arrived by public transport. The Festival included a diverse range of activities, including a wild play day for children, tours round historical sites, bird watching and even alpaca walks. The New Forest Walking Festival was sponsored by Stewarts Garden Centre. Partner organisations for this year's festival included the Forestry Commission, New Forest Association, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire County Council, Ramblers New Forest and Community First New Forest.

We are also trialling some winter guided walks and bike rides aimed at local residents over the coming months.

Walking guides and films

Our new walking packs are proving popular. To accompany the existing series of walks, four short films explaining the routes are being produced with our ranger team. We are also developing an additional 12 routes including walks from bus services for next spring.

Walking website

We will shortly be redeveloping the [walking](#) and [cycling](#) pages of our website following a recent piece of user experience testing. It will focus on making it easier for visitors and residents to find, understand, choose and then enjoy a walk in the National Park. The site will provide people with better search facilities around distance, features, topography and accessibility. It will allow people to navigate easily to the start point and will give them the option of downloading a pdf to take with them or GPX files so they can upload it to their phone or GPS device. The new platform will be very adaptable – meaning however people search we can tailor returns depending on various considerations; ground nesting birds, seasonal walks, public transport and walking festival. There will also be a community feel to it with people being able to favourite and review walks and share them with friends and family.

As part of the development work our next priority is to develop a walk recording template that will allow us to standardise walk information and provide the best content possible. As standard this will include start and finish points, features, waypoints, parking and public transport, styles, videos, permissions and local issues. Individuals will not be able to upload their own routes, but we want to work with established groups and parishes to get some of their material on with appropriate credit; parish walks and accessible walks. The target launch date is Feb/March 2016.

YHA Burley

Our interpretation officer is currently working with YHA New Forest in Burley to improve the display of walking, cycling and running routes within the hostel. Recently a small grant was awarded to significantly upgrade cycle storage facilities on site.

Walkers & Cyclists welcome scheme

We recently launched the *New Forest Walker and Cyclist Approved* accreditation scheme for local accommodation providers to improve the welcome and facilities for visitors looking to walk or cycling in the area. It has been developed in partnership by New Forest Tourism Association (NFTA), New Forest District Council (NFDC) and New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA). It will provide walkers and or cyclists with the confidence that they are booking quality New Forest accommodation, which meets their particular needs, allowing them to enjoy a stress and hassle free trip; one that is more likely to be repeated. Accommodation meeting an agreed set of activity specific criteria will be allowed to display *New Forest Walker and Cyclist Approved* badges at their accommodation and online. We have worked with the NFTA and local businesses to try and make the process of becoming accredited not overly onerous, whilst remaining relevant to guests' expectations.

Railway bridges

The Authority is prepared to make a £3.5k grant available to HCC towards works to upgrade the surfaces of railway bridges, should Network Rail be unable to do this work.

Tame your wild side campaign

Thank you to the subgroup and others for their comments. The film will be launched in the New Year.

Coastal Access

We continue to be fully engaged with the Coastal Access agenda. Nigel Matthews (Head of Recreation Management & Learning) recently attended a meeting in London for all affected Access Authorities.

New Forest Family Cycling Experiences Programme

I have attached the current list of projects, most of which are complete or nearing completion. Since the last meeting, the new Marchwood to Eling Cycleway was opened.

Mark Holroyd. Transport & Tourism Manager. 23/11/15

c) *Forestry Commission* – verbal report from Gary North

d) *Small Grants Scheme* – report from meeting of 10 November prepared by Joan Cundill

There were 15 applications for approx. £21,970. This was the third meeting of the financial year.

There were 4 applications from the NFAF area, two of them in the National Park.

1. **Minstead Parish Council** requested £1,425 to resurface part of Bridleway 13 which gives access to the open forest from the village. Much of the damage seems to be from vehicles, and the application was agreed, subject to a significant contribution from the estate, or the owners of the houses which use the bridleway to access their properties.
2. **Tiptoe Green Trust** requested £1,200 to resurface the circular path on the Green. SGS would like the Trust to register the Green as 'open access land' with HCC. Strong support and SGS agreed.
3. **Testwood Lakes**, which is managed by Hampshire and IOW Wildlife Trust, (HIWWT), requested £2,000. HIWWT plan to improve access to Testwood Lakes, particularly around the upper lake. They have been awarded a grant of £19,728 by the Cleansing Services Group (CSG) through their Landfill Communities Fund. To access this money they need a £2,000 Third Party Contribution to pay for administration of the project prior to releasing the money. Agreed, subject to HCC being happy to pay the money direct to CSG.
4. **Sandleheath Parish Council** requested £840 to resurface an overgrown, tarmac footpath which provides a safe link from Scats Lane to Sandleheath common. SGS would like a bollard removed. Suggestion to request NFDC funding for the remaining 50% cost Agreed.

SGS awarded approximately £12,120 - £13,020 (approx. £900 delegated to the Area Teams if conditions met). Two applications for the remaining funds were deferred for more information.

We have unallocated funds of £19,000 for this financial year, so a 4th round has been provisionally booked for Feb 9th 2016.

Joan Cundill

17 November 2015

e) SSSI restoration site visits

Report from Gordon Garrett

Dibden Bottom / Fernycrofts SSSI restoration consultation site visits 19/11/2015

If there was a more suitable day for visiting the New Forest to see sites intended for mire restoration, I surely can't think of one. It rained for the duration, which given the preceding week's rainfall, enabled us to see the mires in their glory, and also to see the problems resulting from previous attempts at land management within the Forest.

The gathering included representatives from Natural England, The Forestry Commission, The Verderers, New Forest Livestock Society, Commoners defence, a former Head Agister, and last but not least, the New Forest Access Forum.

The sites centred around the area between Fernycrofts and Dibden Bottom which are situated either side of the road between Ipley Crossroads and North Gate Beaulieu, adjacent to King's Hat Inclosure.

Following a brief introduction, we visited each of 4 distinct areas where the previous attempts at drainage or the passing of time had resulted in a deterioration of the mires. Erosion has caused deep and fast flowing channels populated with trees, which in turn had resulted in loss of vegetation common to the mire habitats.

Using LIDAR, it is possible to see the meanders of the original natural drainage system. The spoils from successive attempts at putting in straight drainage channels has resulted in those more gentle natural drains becoming unused or ineffective. The intention is to backfill the deeper and straight drains with mainly the original spoils, which created man made banks at their sides preventing run off from the adjacent land outside of the mires, and reinstate the original meanders where possible. Trees will be removed to encourage the right sort of vegetation.

Comments at the sites ranged from which trees to remove, to the maintaining of fording points for stock. As this would include ridden ponies, there were almost no other issues relating to recreational access. The steep track leading down to Dibden Bottom has become badly rutted through water erosion over the years. The intention is to repair and then camber the track to withstand future water damage for the benefit of walkers.

As an Access Forum member, I found little to involve us, however having the remedial process explained was extremely interesting on a personal level, particularly as this is an area I have visited and used over the past 55 years. For this reason I think it beneficial to have Forum representatives attending the consultation sites who are familiar with the geography of that site. If that is not possible, I would suggest someone attending only if there are known access problems at those sites that need bringing to the attention of the contractors. After all, how many visitors to the Forest would choose to walk over the mires?

Gordon Garrett
19 November 2015