

The Surrey Countryside Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum held online via Zoom Monday, 18 January 2021

Present:

Members (and their primary interests):

- Ian Russell, Chairman (Motor Vehicles)
- Rosie Norris (Mobility vehicles)
- David Bellchamber (Walking)
- Pamela Lyman (Land management)
- Penny Carey (Equestrian)
- Sophie Gordon (Cycling)
- Paul Marshall (Mountain biking)
- Avril Sleeman (Equestrian)
- Elliot Cairnes (Walking)
- Andrew Povey (Local Government)
- Thor Simpson (Walking)
- Romy Jackson (Farming)
- Sean Harrison (Countryside Management)
- Corinna Osborne-Patterson (Landowner)
- John Barber (Motorcycles)

Officers:

- Joanne Porter, Countryside Access Assistant
- Debbie Jones, Senior Countryside Access Officer Legal Definition

Observers:

- Yasmine Broome (Surrey Coalition of Disabled People)

1. Membership of Forum

- 1.1 Surrey County Council has reappointed John Barber, David Bellchamber, Ian Russell, Thor Simpson, and Avril Sleeman were reappointed to the Forum.
- 1.2 Leigh Thornton was not reappointed to the Forum
- 1.3 Cllr Jonathan Hulley was appointed to the Forum by the Surrey Leadership Team.
- 1.4 Corinna Osborne-Patterson (Landowner) and Sean Harrison (Countryside Management) have been newly appointed to the Forum

1.5 The Forum has 19 out of a possible 22 members, so there are 3 vacancies.

2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

2.1 Ian Russell, nominated by Andrew Povey and seconded by Elliot Cairnes was unanimously elected as Chair for the forthcoming year.

2.2 Elliot Cairnes, nominated by Ian Russell and seconded by Avril Sleeman was unanimously elected as Vice-Chair for the forthcoming year.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 Andrew Povey declared that he is a trustee of the Surrey Hills Society

3.2 Sophie Gordon declared that she is an employee of Cycling UK

3.3 Sean Harrison declared that he is an employee of Mole Valley District Council.

4. Apologies

4.1 Gail Brownrigg (carriage driving)

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting

5.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record with a minor amendment

5.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record

6. Matters Arising / Action points

6.1 David hasn't been able to talk to Dave Page yet about the parking issue at Esher Common

Action – David to talk to Dave Page

6.2 Penny will re-send the email and map regarding the Pirbright Memorial Loop

Action – Penny to resend the email

6.3 Avril asked Ian to resend the email from the police regarding electric scooters.

Action – Ian to resend the email

6.4 Ian couldn't get hold of Roger Geffen from Cycling UK to invite him to this meeting

Action – Sophie will try to get hold of Roger

- 6.5 Elliot asked about the MoD Liaison group meeting and the MoD byelaws review.
- 6.6 Ian said that he has been impressed with how the MoD has tried to balance all views and interests as will be seen when the consultation is published.
- 6.7 There will still be problems caused by some rogue users
- 6.8 Penny said that there has been a post on social media about distances to the proposed new entrances to the MoD sites.
- 6.9 Ian said that this is a different issue to the byelaw review, but this will be consulted on as well at the same time.

Action – Ian to find out the timescales regarding the consultations as they have been very delayed due to Covid.

- 6.10 Pamela mentioned a £500,000 grant that Surrey Wildlife Trust have received from the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Forum to promote access and asked what access they are promoting.

Action – Joanne to find out about the grant.

7. Matters dealt with since previous meeting

- 7.1 The letter the Environment Minister regarding the 2026 cut off was acknowledged
- 7.2 Penny said that there is currently a petition that is live regarding the 2026 cut-off and it runs until the 4 February. It is asking for the deadline to be extended for 10 years.
- 7.3 Avril said that there was an article in the Times saying that there are not enough staff to investigate the claims, or even for claims to be authenticated.

8. Surrey Countryside Estate Visitor Experience

- 8.1 Amy Cosgrave from the Countryside Commissioning Team at Surrey County Council gave a presentation outlining the programme of works to enhance the visitor experience at the county council's countryside sites over the next two years.

Action – Joanne to circulate copy of presentation

- 8.2 Ian said that the education of users is very important.
- 8.3 Sean said that he worked for Surrey Countryside Services for many years and one of the issues he can see in the future is the lack of countryside staff.
- 8.4 A lot of similar infrastructure to that which is proposed was installed many years ago when the Disability Discrimination Act came in, and it has obviously been neglected since then.

- 8.5 If a lot of money is spent on new infrastructure then the lack of site-based staff could be a problem as there won't be anyone on site to deal with any issues that arise and could cause a lot of damage to the new infrastructure.
- 8.6 Amy said that there is quite a lot of capital money now to upgrade infrastructure, and she agrees with the challenge of not having a permanent presence on the sites. The team is looking at ways to get around this, such as recruiting regular users to be the eyes and ears on site.
- 8.7 Ian is worried about the safety of volunteers who may confront people who are behaving in an anti-social way, and Pamela said that volunteers shouldn't be relied on to carry out this work.
- 8.8 Amy said that there are Countryside Access Officers, but they are spread thinly and there are no plans at the moment to increase numbers
- 8.9 Sean said that there should be some presence at weekends as this is when most of the damage occurs.
- 8.10 Yasmin said that she attended one of the workshops and it was very positive.
- 8.11 Yasmin said that some of her members have been on virtual trips as they haven't been able to go out since March. Has this been considered for sites in Surrey? It can also be seen from the virtual trip if the site is suitable for a real-life visit.
- 8.12 Corinna said that she likes the idea of virtual tours, and she understood that Surrey University was looking into developing the virtual experience.
- 8.13 Corinna asked if stiles are being replaced?
- 8.14 Rosie said that gates are an issue as well – they should be large kissing gates.
- 8.15 Amy will feed back the virtual tour idea to look into.
- 8.16 Amy said that her team are looking at more accessible trails around the countryside estate with no barriers.
- 8.17 Sean said Rangers on site are very useful for a lot of reasons.
- 8.18 Ian stated that SCAF would like to emphasise to SCC the advantages of a physical presence on site at key locations, at the very least on an ad hoc basis, i.e. targeting key sites at key times. We acknowledge there are funding issues, but the presence of officials such as rangers would act as a deterrent to bad behaviour and help educate those who do not understand how to behave in the countryside.
- 8.19 Sophie said that Paths for All have lots of guidance regarding accessibility.

8.20 Penny asked what the budget is for the team. Amy said that there are two sources of funding separate from rights of way funding. One is transformation funding which is £650,000 over two years which includes staffing in the countryside commissioning team. The other is capital funding which is £1.2 million over 5 years, although this is front loaded. Some of the funding from this year will be carried over to next year.

8.21 Research will be carried out before the transformation funding will be committed.

8.22 Furniture will start to be installed in the next few months.

9. Disability Access

9.1 Joanne gave an update that was provided by Diane Cooper, Surrey County Council.

9.2 Diane is carrying out a review of the easy access walks on the Surrey County Council website with Lawrie Baker from Active Surrey, and they have asked for assistance from their contacts, although there hasn't been much take up yet.

9.3 Diane is very keen for user groups such as disabled ramblers to help check the easy access routes, and would also like any information about any potential new routes that can be added to the list. Diane has added a link to the webpage to the Accessible Countryside for Everyone website.

Action – If anyone would like to help with this let Joanne know.

9.4 Active Surrey will be promoting easy and healthy walks in a spring campaign. Updates will be put on the Easy Access Walks and promoted on social media. There may even be posters funded by Active Surrey.

9.5 Surrey have just received Green prescribing funding so there will be more activity over the next two years.

9.6 Debbie said that she has audited the easy access routes in the past with the help of the Disabled Ramblers.

9.7 Debbie said that stiles and gates are owned by the landowner, so their permission is required to change the structure to anything more accessible.

9.8 Yasmin said that she sends out an update every week to her members so she can get in touch with people through these means if required.

9.9 Thor said that if any virtual tours are produced, they should also be done from the viewpoint of a wheelchair / tramper user.

9.10 Rosie said that there are photos of routes on the disabled ramblers website.

9.11 David said that information can be shared on the SCAF Facebook page.

10. Ripley South Consultation

10.1 David Bellchamber provided the following update:

In a role with Surrey Countryside Access, I attended a virtual meeting on 8th January with developers Taylor Wimpey about “Wisley New Settlement” (the name adopted for development involving over 2,000 new homes at the former Wisley Airfield)

The meeting was named “Ripley South Study” as it was for looking in the main at the effect on Ripley of the placing of north facing slip roads at Burnt Common. These are favoured by Guildford Borough Council as a mitigation measure but may not be the only option.

Inevitably those taking part from nearby communities wanted a wider discussion, which was actually relevant in considering the Ockham Park roundabout. I was able to restate my Cobham view, favoured by most attending, that there should be south facing slip roads there.

I looked at the possibility of ROWs being affected by any work either at Burnt Common or Ockham Park. We need more detail but there seems to be no danger of any being taken away. At Ockham Park in particular there is going to have to be some careful attention to detail to ensure safe use by NMUs. I expressed concern about ensuring safety was maintained for NMUs along stretches of road that would be the subject of increased traffic.

One observation from West Clandon Parish Council was as to increased traffic going to countryside sites such as Newlands Corner and suggesting that might be a permanent feature. I suggested that only time would tell as there might be a reversion to use of gyms and other exercise facilities.

The British Horse Society was represented by Sarah Rayfield. She identified part of what the BHS would like to achieve in the wider area around the development. I took down linking BW71 and BW 73 and upgrading FP70 to bridleway status. These appear to be peripheral to the development proposals. For what SCAF can do, I would look to safeguard and enhance ROWs. Taylor Woodrow are not bound by previous applications but the last one proposed an enhanced cycle way to Brooklands which is the type of improvement that should still commend itself.

Junction 10 improvements.

The timetable for this had the Secretary for State for Transport making a decision on (and expected to grant) a Development Consent Order (DCO) for Junction 10 on 12th January. It was perhaps no surprise that the decision has now been put back to 12th May 2021, mainly it is said to ensure appropriate provision of replacement land for that to be lost. By implication other aspects including the provisions for NMUs in the proposals are not to be the subject of further evidence. Taylor Wimpey cannot put

in an application to Guildford Borough Council for the development at the former Wisley Airfield until a DCO has been granted.

10.2 Joanne has circulated a copy of the presentation that was given at the event.

11. Environmental Land Management Scheme

11.1 Romy gave a presentation about what is proposed for the new post-Brexit land management scheme.

Action – Joanne to circulate the presentation.

11.2 Rosie asked if the Basic Payment Scheme is on an area basis.

11.3 Penny asked if anything will change from the Pilot schemes or is it too early to tell. Romy said the at the NFU has asked for a delay in the payment reductions under the old scheme as they don't know what the new scheme is.

11.5 Penny said that it appears that access has not been addressed. Romy said that it hasn't been addressed, and there is more conflict now with users such as path through fields getting wider.

11.7 Thor said that current EU legislation is now UK law. Romy said that yes, it is, and in the future the NFU would like higher standards to be law rather than optional.

11.8 Pamela asked if Rob Fairbanks from the Surrey Hills AONB is involved with ELMS. Romy said that there are currently some trials going on in Surrey to see what can work in practise and what can be funded in advance.

12. Outstanding consultations

12.1 Outstanding consultations were noted.

13. Forward Plan

13.1 Minor amendments were suggested to the forward plan.

Action – Joanne to amend forward plan as suggested

13.2 Thor asked about Facebook and if SCAF should still use it due to it moving UK users to be based in the US and US privacy laws.

Action – Joanne to find out information about this.

14. Any other urgent business / public questions

- 14.1 Pamela asked if the Golden Parish is still going ahead. Joanne answered that the idea hadn't been taken forward since Kieran Foster left the Forum. David said that he hadn't seen anything about the idea on any of the Parish Council websites.
- 14.2 Avril said that she is concerned that Tandridge DC are very reactive in terms of their planning consultations. They don't send out applications automatically anymore.
- 14.3 Penny said that horse-riders usually find out about planning applications through social media. Ian suggested that everyone should keep their ear to the ground in case they hear of anything that could affect the rights of way network.

Action – Joanne to find out if there is a way to get planning applications that only affect rights of way.

- 14.4 Penny asked if anyone had any experience doing a Surrey application for Community Infrastructure Levy funding. She would like to apply for a new crossing in Elmbridge. No-one had done an application.

15. Date of next meeting

- 15.1 Monday 26 April 2021 1.30pm
Meeting to be held online