

The Surrey Countryside Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum held at Guildford Borough Council Offices, Millmead, Guildford Monday, 15 July 2019

Present:

Members and their Primary Interest:

Ian Russell (Chairman)	Motor Vehicles
Rosie Norris	Mobility vehicles
David Bellchamber	Walking
John Barber	Motor cycling
Pamela Lyman	Land management
Elliot Cairnes	Walking
Thor Simpson	Walking
John Whitaker	Carriage driving
Gail Brownrigg	Carriage driving
Penny Carey	Equestrian

Officers:

Steve Mitchell	Countryside Access and Operations Team Manager
Joanne Porter	Countryside Access Assistant

Observers:

Sophie Gordon	Cycling UK
Yasmin Broome	Surrey Coalition for Disabled People

1 Declarations of interest

- 1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2 Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Andrew Povey (local government), Lisa Creaye-Griffin (Countryside Group Manager), Romy Jackson (farming), Avril Sleeman (equestrian)

3 Be Nice, Say Hi campaign – Rob Fairbanks. Surrey Hills A O N B

- 3.1 Rob Fairbanks played two videos that demonstrated that most horseriders and cyclists would like the same things from the rights of way network.
- 3.2 Rob gave a presentation giving a background to the Surrey Hills A O N B and about the Be Nice Say Hi campaign and other initiatives such as the creation of off-road cycle trails.
- 3.3 Pamela L asks who monitors the promoted trails so that they are fit for purpose and safe. Rob said that every situation is different and that on the 'off-

- piste' bike routes putting up signage and furniture to mitigate and warn about risk has worked.
- 3.4 Rod said that the 'off piste' promoted routes are graded according to the Forestry Commission standards.
 - 3.5 Rob said the biggest problem is maintaining the route due to lack of resources.
 - 3.6 Rob said that in the future they are working with landowners to control 'off-piste' mountain biking rather than promoting it
 - 3.7 Gail B said that there is conflict between different users about the surfacing of routes as different users prefer different surfaces, including different types of cyclists such as family cyclists and mountain bikers.
 - 3.8 The presentation said respect wildlife and other users. But users should have priority over wildlife.
 - 3.9 Members would like to see more education of cyclists and also users with dogs.
 - 3.10 Ian R asked members to get the Be Nice, Say Hi message out to other user groups.
 - 3.11 John B said it seems a bit unfair that mountain bikers can go off rights of way, but if off road motor cyclists do it they can have their bikes crushed.
 - 3.12 Sophie G said that bike shops should have a role in educating people who are not members of a group and may not be aware of issues.
 - 3.13 Ian said that the Green Lanes Association (G L A S S) have a code of conduct. The problem is non-members that go out at night and drive illegally off road causing a lot of damage.
 - 3.14 Yasmine B said that walking in the countryside would be a more pleasant experience if people were more aware of the other users and polite to each other.
 - 3.15 Yasmine is also concerned that sometimes people aren't aware of who is allowed to use various rights of way – a Duke of Edinburgh group was directed down a byway which was completely inappropriate.
 - 3.16 Gail suggested that S C A F could help D of E students with advice.
 - 3.17 David said that there used to be Ramblers special trains that used to go to Surrey from London.
 - 3.18 Rob said that the Surrey Hills A O N B are working with train and bus companies on promoting access to the Surrey Hills.
 - 3.19 The status of e-bikes was queried.

- 3.20 Sophie said that e-bikes are legal to use where all normal bikes are allowed. E-bikes are limited to 15 mph, which is around the normal speed that a bike is ridden. The weight of the bike may have more of an impact on the speed it can go when going downhill rather than having an electric engine.
- 3.21 Some e-bikes have been modified and can go faster but they are not classified as a bike.
- 3.22 Pamela said that cyclists should be aware that they have a duty of care to themselves and other users.
- 3.23 Rob said that there is a cycling code of conduct on the Surrey Hills A O N B website.
- 3.24 Ian said that members need to think about how members can promote the duty of care to other users.
- 3.25 Elliott said that it goes beyond people who are a member of an organisation as the problems are often caused by people who aren't a member of an organisation and so won't be aware of the issues.
- 3.26 Rob said that the Summer Lightning trail on Leith Hill has signs at the head of the trail as well as waymarking signs and slowdown signs where the trails cross other rights of way. Thor thinks that the signs should be blunter and more direct.

Action – Joanne P to send around a copy of the presentation.

4 Surrey Police and Countryside Access Issues

- 4.1 PC Hollie Iribar and PS Claire Sutherland introduced themselves to members.
- 4.2 Claire said that education of users should start with basics about who is allowed on a Footpath, Bridleway and BOAT. She thinks the A O N B should be more robust in its message as conflict is bad in lots of places between all types of users including users with dogs.
- 4.3 Claire said that in Waverley she deals with community issues and tries to sort out certain identified issues. In Cranleigh a big problem is the illegal use of Quad bikes such as along a private road and on bridleways.
- 4.4 She tries to get involved in preventative work such as saddle and bike marking.
- 4.5 Unfortunately the police don't have the resources to deal with issues such as illegal use of rights of way.
- 4.6 Claire said that the police have also been carrying out education at schools and they are just about to start a scheme where they go in to every school every term.
- 4.7 One of the subjects that they will talk to Year 11 students about is road user awareness which also involves the fire and ambulance service. Something

could be included about off-roading. Educating about road safety is the main priority.

- 4.8 Claire also suggested that bikeability schemes could be used as a conduit to educate about where and how bikes can be ridden from a young age.
- 4.9 Hollie said that hopefully in the next year there will be a team of wildlife and rural crime officers – there are only 2 officers at the moment.
- 4.10 Surrey Police have realised that they haven't been doing enough for rural people. The staff working at the call centre don't realise that some incidents that happen in the countryside are actually police issues.
- 4.11 Hollie said that if people do have an issue and get no help from the police, then contact Hollie and she can look in to it.
- 4.12 Hollie would like all issues to be recorded so that the police can get a better picture of what is happening in an area.
- 4.13 Quad bikes are also a big issue for her.
- 4.14 Hollie and some members of the forum attended Operation Dragnet events in Coldharbour and Frensham. Police went out on horses and on police trail bikes to meet countryside and rights of way users and educate about issues.
- 4.15 Ian said that he thinks that the off road police motorbikes need to be back in action to stand a better chance of catching illegal users. Claire thinks that there is currently one bike in use as there is only one trained user.
- 4.16 Hollie said that there are issues that need to be worked through in relation to Health and Safety and road safety before they can be used, but the police are keen to do so.
- 4.17 Penny asked what the best way to get in touch and report issues. Claire said that the best way to report issues is online.
- 4.18 Hollie said that Countrywatch is a bit like neighbourhood watch. It is linked to from the website 'In the know'. <https://www.intheknow.community/> . You can sign up to receive updates for various areas and options. Countrywatch is an option you can sign up to.
- 4.19 Ian said that Gail has drafted a letter to send to the chief constable (?) regarding the off road motorbikes.

Action – JP to circulate draft letter to members.

- 4.20 Hollie's email address is 40756@surrey.pnn.police.uk. People can also directly email their local neighbourhood team.

5 Minutes of previous meeting

- 5.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2019 were confirmed as a correct record.

6 Matters dealt with since previous meeting

6.1 The following matters were acknowledged:

- M o D YouGov survey link sent out
- Equestrian guidance for developers and planners document from Hampshire circulated

7 Matters arising/action points

7.1 Ian can invite Hugh Broom to a future meeting

Action – Ian to invite Hugh Broom to a future meeting

7.2 Ian asked the forum again if anyone would like to volunteer to be vice-chair.

Note – after the meeting Elliot offered to stand as vice-chair

7.3 Ian mentioned the YouGov survey commissioned by the M o D that was recently circulated to members.

7.4 Steve found out that equestrian use on the Basingstoke Canal towpath would be unlikely to be permitted, so an alternative route will need to be found.

Action – Ian will raise this at the next M o D liaison meeting

7.5 Joanne to investigate what is happening to the National L A F Huddle group run by Natural England.

Action – Joanne to look in to the Huddle situation.

7.6 Dan will attend the next meeting to give his presentation.

Action – Joanne to invite Dan and Richard Parkinson to the October meeting

7.7 David circulated proposals regarding a Surrey Countryside Access Forum Facebook page

7.8 David is an administrator on a couple of other Facebook pages and could set a new one up for S C A F as well.

7.9 If anyone has any suggestions for the Facebook page then send them to David.

Action – David to set up a new Facebook page for the Surrey Countryside Access Forum

7.10 Rosie will try to look at the easy access routes on the Surrey County Council website.

Action – Rosie will look on the website.

Action – Steve will send a link to the Surrey County Council website so Rosie can look where structures are

- 7.11 Rosie had an issue with a report in the Surrey Advertiser of Ramblers installing a new pedestrian gate. The pedestrian gate is not suitable for mobility vehicles.
- 7.12 Rosie wrote to Surrey County Council to complain and got a reply from John Baker. John said that the gap wasn't wide enough for a mobility gate.
- 7.13 Rosie is concerned that John said 'wheelchair accessible' when Rosie and other users use Trampers to access the countryside. John may not be aware of what trampers can do.
- 7.14 Rosie wrote to the Disabled Ramblers and they have offered the loan of a trampler to Surrey County Council so they can see what they are capable of.
- 7.15 Rosie is concerned that another 6 gates have been donated by the Ramblers and none of them will be suitable for trampers, when a wider access gate could be installed.
- 7.16 Elliot said that a suitable footpath should be identified and then suitable gates can be installed.
- 7.17 Gates are often donated by the Ramblers in memory of someone, or funded by subscription.
- 7.18 Landowners also need to give permission if a different gate / structure is to be installed.
- 7.19 Steve re-iterated what Elliot said. At the end of the day it is down to the landowner and what they will allow to be installed.
- 7.20 Mobility gates are significantly bigger and more expensive.
- 7.21 Often there are other obstacles on the paths where a mobility gate could be installed, but there will be other obstacles further along the paths such as steps, stiles, steep gradients and the path may be too narrow to install a mobility gate.
- 7.22 Suitable routes need to be identified by users.
- 7.23 Rosie asked to see where mobility gates have recently been installed
- 7.24 Kissing gates replacing stiles does improve accessibility, but not for people in mobility vehicles.

Action – Rosie to liaise with Elliot regarding mobility gates and potential locations.

Action – Joanne to send Rosie a list of gates that John has installed that are accessible.

Action – Rosie will circulate information about what makes a good accessible route. There is information on the Disabled Ramblers website.

- 7.25 Steve said that the BT Access for All document from the Fieldfare Trust was used by Surrey County Council before and wondered if there was a more up-to-date version.

8 Forward Plan

- 8.1 Ian asked members to put some thought to put into items on the forward plan, especially regarding horse riding and cycling.
- 8.2 Pamela asked if there was a code of conduct for the rights of way network and criteria and standards for a fit for purpose promoted route.
- 8.3 Steve said that it is not a black and white issue regarding liability and the issue can be quite complex

9 Outstanding Consultations

- 9.1 Details of outstanding consultations were noted.

10 Any other urgent business/public questions

- 10.1 Thor said that the Quarry operating in Chalkpit Lane is appealing against the planning decision and there is going to be a public enquiry.
- 10.2 David asked about Oak Processionary Moth and how they could affect rights of way, and what Surrey County Council is doing about the risk.
- 10.3 Steve said that there are working groups looking into this issue. It is very expensive to spray trees after receiving a Plant Health notice from the Forestry Commission and authorities are struggling to pay for these, as well as the fact that it doesn't appear to have an effect on the spread of the caterpillar.
- 10.4 Steve said that there is a bridleway in Guildford that is near some trees that are affected. At the moment it will probably be dealt with by putting up warning notices.

11 Date of Next Meeting

- 11.1 It was confirmed that the next meeting will be held on:
 - Monday 14 October 1.30pm
County Hall, Kingston-upon-Thames