

## **The Surrey Countryside Access Forum**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum held at online via Zoom Monday, 14 September 2020**

#### **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)
- Andrew Povey (Local Government)
- Elliot Cairnes (Walking)
- Richard Billington (Local Government)
- Thor Simpson (Walking)

Officers:

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

Observers:

- Yasmine Broome, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People
- Roger Troughton, Cyclist, Volunteer Path Warden

#### **1. Declarations of Interest**

1.1 Andrew Povey stated that he was a trustee of the Surrey Hills Society

#### **2. Apologies**

2.1 Apologies were received from John Barber (motor cycling) and Gail Brownrigg (Carriage driving)

#### **3. Minutes of previous meeting**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record with minor corrections.

#### **4. Matters arising/action points**

- 4.1 David said that the new Facebook page is up and running
- 4.2 Action – Joanne to send the link to the Facebook page around
- 4.3 Pamela doesn't have time to do any work on looking at the easy access routes.

**Action** – Carry action forward to revisit next year

**Action** – David said that he can talk to Dave Page at Elmbridge BC about the parking issue at Esher Common

**Action** – Joanne to contact Surrey Hills AONB to invite them to nominate a possible Forum member.

- 4.4 David gave an update regarding the M25 / A3 junction. The consultation has now closed. The BHS is not happy about certain aspects of the scheme, but the benefits will outweigh any disadvantages.
- 4.5 David said that the new routes should be accessible to mobility vehicles.  
**Action** – Joanne to check with Steve Mitchell if the BHS bridge specification has been sent to him and Highways England.
- 4.6 Action relating to issues face by landowners in the countryside has been added to the forward plan
- 4.7 Action relating to inviting member of Hampshire BHS has been added to the forward plan.
- 4.8 Penny and Avril will update the 2026 cut-off letter and send to Joanne  
**Action** – Joanne to send the updated 2026 cut-off letter to the Secretary of State for the Environment.

## **5. Matters dealt with since previous meeting**

- 5.1 Penny is concerned about what the proposals for the restoration of the Wey and Arun Canal mean for the Downslink. There seems to be a lot of individual planning applications put in at different times so it's hard to get an idea of what the whole picture is and how they link together.
- 5.2 Debbie said that the Wey and Arun Canal Trust has had discussions with Surrey County Council, and that sections of the Downslink may be diverted in the future, but with the same access rights.
- 5.3 Andrew said that Surrey County Council is now looking for suggestions of where trees should be planted as part of the tree strategy. This would initially be in more urban areas.

- 5.4 Avril is concerned about trees being planted on verges that are important off-road links for horse riders.
- 5.5 Ian requested that members do not send out emails that could be misinterpreted as coming from the Surrey Countryside Access Forum.

## **6. Coronavirus Pandemic and the Countryside**

- 6.1 Hendryk Jurk, Countryside Manager, Guildford Borough Council gave a presentation showing the challenges faced by countryside managers and landowners during the Coronavirus lockdown.
- 6.2 Visitor numbers to the countryside increased hugely which caused problems such as increased rubbish, damage caused by BBQ's, anti-social behaviour, erosion and damage to habitats.
- 6.3 Guildford Borough Council and the government had to put out publicity reminding people of how to behave properly in the countryside.
- 6.4 Hendryk said that there was a lot of new visitors who hadn't been to the countryside before and expect an urban level of facilities. Education is important.
- 6.5 Pamela said that she had similar experiences as a landowner and it caused her great anxiety. There was a lot anti-social behaviour and due to the sheer number of people going through her land it felt more like a public park and not private land. She also received abuse from some users.
- 6.6 Avril said that it wasn't just a countryside problem – lots of urban parks had similar issues.
- 6.7 Richard said that a big problem was people advertising locations on social media and then lots of people turning up.
- 6.8 Thor said that he knows a photographer that now removes location information from his photos to prevent this happening.
- 6.9 Sophie said that it's wrong to just blame young people for these issues. It should be taken as a positive that there were new visitors to the countryside, but education about how to behave in the countryside is important.
- 6.10 David said that there should be legislation to combat anti-social behaviour such as that in place for dogs.
- 6.11 Pamela said that the police won't respond to issues on her property as it is a civil matter.

6.12 Debbie suggested that landowners could put signage up such as the countryside code, and confirmed that users had right to 'pass and repass' and not stop and have a picnic. Any trespass is a civil matter.

6.13 Avril said that there were also problems with cyclists on footpath going too fast

6.14 Sophie said that Cycling UK has been giving out lots of advice to cyclists but more could always be done.

**Action** – Joanne to send link to Surrey County Council webpage that outlines who is allowed to use a Public Footpath.

6.15 Pamela was concerned about several initiatives to encourage cycling and the position of Surrey County Council when it receives an application to upgrade a Footpath to a Bridleway.

6.16 Debbie confirmed that if a request was received then the landowner would be approached and the application considered on its merits.

6.17 Paul said that the Surrey County Council website clearly states that cyclists are not allowed on footpaths.

**Action** – Ian thanked Hendryk for his presentation.

## **7. Surrey County Council Update**

7.1 Debbie said that Countryside has received £2.3 million to be spent over the next 5 years, of which £1.3 million will be received this financial year.

7.2 The team are putting together projects and applying for all the necessary permissions and finding suppliers who can provide what is required. Projects include surfacing, repairing and replacing bridges, signposting, and increased vegetation clearance. There are 5 members of staff dealing with the projects, including those that are acting up into new roles.

7.3 In terms of team members, Eniko Nadas has now been replaced by Adrian Riddle, and there is another new member of staff, John Sharman who has replaced Paul Manwaring who has moved into the countryside estate team. There is also a new bank staff, Paul Ritchie to help out with the projects.

7.4 Steve Mitchell is currently managing the new countryside estate team and there will be two new rangers, a business support offer, and land protection officer. A liaison officer and senior officer to manage the team will be advertised soon.

- 7.5 Penny asked how many more staff there are in total in the countryside access team. Debbie said there are six new staff - four in post and two to be advertised.
- 7.6 Debbie said that the countryside access team has gained one bank staff who will work one or two days a week, and there are six people in the countryside estate team.
- 7.7 Avril said that there was a problem with lack of inspection of rights of way during lockdown.
- 7.8 Debbie said that any safety issues would have been inspected in accordance with the rights of way priority statement.
- 7.9 Pamela asked how much land had been compulsory purchased to facilitate rights of way.
- 7.10 Debbie said that she is not aware of any land that has been compulsory purchased.
- 7.11 David asked about when volunteer path wardens (VPWs) would be operating again.
- 7.12 Debbie said that she had attended a meeting that morning about VPWs and said that it was difficult to organise tasks due to social distancing, and that as there is so much capital money in the budget this year then Surrey County Council is paying contractors to do the work. Tasks should start again next year.
- 7.13 Pamela and David were concerned about Surrey Wildlife Trust allowing cycling on a footpath.
- 7.14 Debbie said that a landowner can allow it, and Surrey County Council would only get involved if it damages the surface or becomes a public nuisance.

**Action** – Joanne to find out if cyclists are allowed on a footpath on SWT owned land near Bay Pond.

- 7.15 David is concerned that Surrey Wildlife Trust will allow cycling on footpaths across all their land.

## **8. Wolvens Lane surface repair / Byways**

- 8.1 Ian is concerned that motorised vehicles will soon be prohibited from using Wolvens Lane through a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) after the resurfacing works have been completed.

- 8.2 Debbie said that Claire Saunders is overseeing the resurfacing project, and that there has been a request from the Parish Council and Surrey Hills AONB for an Experimental TRO.
- 8.3 Debbie is investigating if the criteria for an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) is met. If the criteria is met, the proposal to make an ETRO would be advertised for a public consultation period. It would then go to Committee for a decision on whether or not to publicise a draft Order for a statutory objection period.
- 8.4 Ian suggested that there could be a permit system.
- 8.5 Paul said that Mole Valley District Council had over 700 objection letters to previous proposals to make a TRO.
- 8.6 Avril asked how capital money can be spent on a maintenance issue. Debbie said that it is improvement works - a byway only has to be maintained to bridleway standard.
- 8.7 Penny asked if the new surface will encourage more anti-social use of the byway. Debbie said that she didn't think so as the new surface wouldn't be as much 'fun' for motorised vehicles to use.
- 8.8 Penny asked who the statutory consultees are for a TRO.

**Action** – Joanne can send Penny the list.

## **9. MoD byelaw review**

- 9.1 Ian said that the review has been delayed by Coronavirus, but the MoD is now working towards carrying out a consultation. Ian goes to the liaison group meeting and they would be involved at the first stage of the consultation.
- 9.2 Ian said that areas of Ash Ranges had been closed during the lockdown, but that the closures have been maintained since the end of lockdown, which has upset a lot of the locals.
- 9.3 Ian understands that the MoD is committed to ensuring access for the public to MoD land as much as possible, but the current byelaws were written a long time ago before health and safety regulation came into force which means the MoD have much more responsibility for the safety of the public. This means looking to make access safer for the public and having to fence off more dangerous areas.
- 9.4 Penny suggested that a map should be distributed to be able to understand the issues more. She said there had been a big impact on sections of the local community who have used these areas for many years.

- 9.5 Ian said there is not much that can be done until the public consultation begins.
- 9.6 Penny said that there has been issues regarding the proposed Pirbright Memorial 10 mile Loop circular route for equestrians that crosses into Surrey from Hampshire. There are issues with the suitability of the route such as the width and heights under Cowshot Bridge. Penny is waiting for confirmation of the ownership of the bridge that the Basingstoke Canal Authority have refused equestrian access over.

**Action** – Penny to send Joanne a map of the route to circulate to members.

## **10. Annual Review 2018-19 and 2019-20**

- 10.1 The annual review is not sent to Defra / Natural England anymore since their support of LAFs has declined.

**Action** – Joanne to put on website.

## **11. Forward Plan**

- 11.1 Carry forward to the next meeting.

## **12. Outstanding Consultations**

- 12.1 Details of outstanding consultations were noted.

## **13. Any other urgent business/public questions**

- 13.1 Roger suggested contacting local access groups about what routes their members like to use in relation to the easy access routes.
- 13.2 Rosie thinks that they would use more urban routes rather the rural routes and suggested that the disabled ramblers might be able help.
- 13.3 Pamela asked if members had read her articles that she circulated and if anyone had any comments.
- 13.4 Andrew said that a new Economic Strategy is coming to Surrey County Council soon and can ask questions.
- 13.5 Avril said that Pamela was wrong in what she said about volunteers using power tools on rights of way. Avril has done the training with Surrey County Council and it was made clear that the use of power tools is not allowed.
- 13.6 Avril also said that Pamela was wrong to say that it is Surrey County Council policy that privacy of landowners is not considered when a claim for a right of

way is made. This is a national policy and is the first thing that is mentioned at a Public Inquiry by the Inspector.

13.7 Pamela said that the public do more than pass and re-pass on a right of way.

13.8 Elliot said that some people are using paths in an anti-social manner.

13.9 Debbie said that as long as the person using the path is not undertaking a criminal activity then it is a civil matter.

13.10 Thor said that the path may have been there for a long time but the nature of use has changed. Thor asked how the Scottish right to roam system works and how different is it to England?

13.11 Thor also asked what the impact of the deregulation bill would be on these issues.

13.12 David asked about the King Alfred's Way cycle route and what is happening around Waverley Abbey.

13.13 Sophie was unable to answer as she had dropped off the line.

#### **14. Date of Next Meeting**

14.1 It was agreed to hold an interim meeting in November to catch up with the forward plan and that the membership review should be carried out by the planned meeting in January 2021.

**Action** – Joanne to send around possible dates for a meeting in November.