

## The Surrey Countryside Access Forum

### Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum Maple Room, Woodhatch Place and online via Microsoft teams Monday, 11 July 2022

#### Present:

Members (and their primary interests):

- Elliot Cairnes, Chairman (Walking)
- Thor Simpson (Walking)
- John Barber (Motorcycles)
- Ian Wilks (Walking)
- Penny Carey (Equestrian)
- Vicky Keller (Countryside Management)
- Corinna Osborne-Patterson (Landowner)
- Paul Marshall (Mountain Biking)
- Sophie Gordon (Cycling)

Officers:

- Joanne Porter, Countryside Access Assistant
- Claire Saunders, Countryside Access Team Manager
- Rob Fairbanks, Director - Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Observers:

- Tony Ford, Wey and Arun Canal
- Peter Hattersley
- Yasmin Broome

#### 1. Declarations of Interest

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2. Apologies

2.1 Avril Sleeman (Equestrian), Pamela Lyman (Landowner), Gail Brownrigg (Carriage driving)

#### 3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2022 were confirmed.

#### 4. Matters arising / Action points

4.1 Joanne did speak to Mary Ann about North Park farm quarry and Avril's concerns. Claire said that Mary Ann had met on site with Sibelco and looked at the new proposed routes. The intention is to keep some of the currently used routes across the site as rights of way. Surrey County Council in this instance has limited powers and Mary Ann thinks that this will be the best outcome within the planning legislation.

- 4.2 Thor asked if any social contributions through the planning system could be used here. Claire said that Tandridge District Council are not collecting the Community Infrastructure Levy yet.
- 4.3 The problems reporting and looking at rights of way issues through the reporting system on the Surrey County Council website was reported to Exegesis who own the software. The latest upgrade was unfortunately not as successful as it was hoped and there have been quite a few problems. The problem with the maps has hopefully been fixed. The issue regarding dates when an issue was first reported has not been fixed as they don't know what is causing this problem, but it is being investigated.
- 4.4 Medium kissing gates installed in Surrey recently and gates installed by Hampshire County Council.

**Action** – carry forward these actions.

- 4.5 Penny would like to thank Steve Mitchell for passing her request regarding height barriers at car park entrances on the Countryside Estate on to Paul Manwaring. He has contacted Penny and asked what requirements horse riders have. She has passed it on to the British Horse Society to decide the options and hopefully there will be a trial to see how it works
- 4.6 Elliot said that there has been no Ministry of Defence / Local Access Forum liaison meeting yet despite there being correspondence about it.
- 4.7 Penny and Elliot attended a remote presentation regarding connectivity along the A24 corridor. Several options were presented. They have asked to be kept informed.

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

- 5.1 The Surrey County Council Minerals and Waste Plan Issues and Options response was acknowledged
- 5.2 The BOAT 525 (Wotton, Dorking and Capel) Prohibition of Traffic Order consultation response was acknowledged.

## **6. Wey and Arun Canal Trust (WACT) – Incorporating access into restoration plans – Tony Ford, Wey and Arun Canal**

- 6.1 Tony Ford gave a presentation outlining the broad plans to restore / recreate the length of the canal and how they would like to incorporate access into their plans, and to invite views from users to help inform their plans.

**Action** – Joanne to circulate the presentation.

- 6.2 Ian asked if the section around Whitley has been sold to WACT. Tony confirmed that it had. Claire confirmed that the Downlink is managed by Surrey County Council despite its split ownership.
- 6.3 Elliot asked if aspirations to restore the rail line along the route of the canal and the Downlink could affect their plans. Tony said that they would like to respect the fact with their planning applications that the rail link may be restored in the future.
- 6.4 It was asked if the WACT is a navigation authority. Tony said that to become a Navigation Authority there needs to be a continuous route which the canal isn't. The

Basingstoke Canal has a navigation authority. If the Wey and Arun Canal becomes more continuous then the WACT will look at options to become a navigation authority.

- 6.5 Paul asked for assurance that the rights of ways along the canal are respected and that any diversions in place respect the current users. He is concerned that rights will be lost. Tony said that during construction works an agreed alternative route would be provided as part of the planning process. Members of the Forum are concerned that any construction could take years and have a negative effect on current users.
- 6.6 Rob asked if the Wey and Arun Canal Trust have the Freehold of land and if they have considered dedication of rights. Tony said that they have the Freehold of parts of the land, which they have been gifted or bought, and that they will discuss with users about the dedication of rights where new permissive routes have been established. This would also depend on what is appropriate according to the location. Any new routes created by the WACT will be 3 metres wide wherever possible and surface with appropriate materials. Where there is equestrian use, a separate path will be considered. Claire said that Surrey County Council usually recommends designating new paths as a bridleway, but this does depend on restrictions such as bends and bridges, so recommendations may vary from location to location.
- 6.7 Claire asked where the funding for the restoration is coming from. Tony said that they have money from memberships and legacies. They haven't received any grants yet apart from some charitable trusts. They will look at lottery funding as the restoration progresses. At the moment they have funding in place for the three current projects that they have put planning applications in for.
- 6.8 Sophie asked if there are any locations where a route parallel to the towpath has been created. Tony wasn't aware of any locations, but the WACT are willing to do this where it is best for users, and they are able to do it.
- 6.9 Penny said that she had visited Hornshill in Sussex which is also an old railway route and there is a bridleway very close to a canal which seemed to work.
- 6.10 Ian said that he has been involved in looking at the WACT plans for the last two and a half years as a Rambler and would like a few clarifications. Such as how the WACT can restore water to the canal. Tony said that there is a hydrology report which provided information including about flood risk. There are several sources of water, and water can also be back pumped from further down the canal. Many lengths of the canal already carry water all year round. Ian is concerned that the lack of water in recreated parts of the canal will affect the amenity value and public enjoyment of the canal. Ian also asked about the gaps in the canal where some landowners are against restoration. Tony replied that the restoration / recreation is a very long-term project and the land where these missing links are could become available in the future.
- 6.11 Ian said that in the Highways response to the planning application they asked for a 5-metre width – this is 3 metres for the path and a 1 metre verge on either side and asked if that was possible. Claire said that is what Surrey County Council has asked for. Tony said that the planning application specified that there will be a 5-metre width provided along the length of the whole restored canal wherever possible.
- 6.12 Ian feels that any new paths should be dedicated, and diversions should be done as part of the planning permission and subsequent diversion order.

- 6.13 Elliot proposed holding a separate sub-group meeting to look at the issues raised by the planning applications and to have a site visit to part of the canal.
- 6.14 Ian, Penny, Elliot, Paul, Corinna and Sophie would all like to be part of the sub-group. Rob asked to be kept informed and Claire asked that Mary Ann Edwards should also be kept informed.

**Action** – Elliot to arrange a date for a sub-group meeting.

## **7. Surrey Hills AONB – user groups update and issues discussions**

- 7.1 Rob gave a presentation that provided an update.

**Action** – Joanne to circulate the presentation

- 7.2 Rob said that the Mole Gap Trail is relaunching this week – there is an electronic guide to the walk that is available by scanning a QR code
- 7.3 Elliot said that encouraging people to visit the Surrey Hills is causing damage to areas and sites, so the adverse impacts need to be addressed. Rob said that the Sandford Principle is applicable - conservation should come first when conflicts cannot be reconciled. Certain activities cause more problems rather than the number of visitors, for example one dog off a lead could cause more damage than 20 ramblers.
- 7.4 Yasmin asked about access for disabled people – is there information online that is accessible, for example are videos described? There is new funding available from the government for accessibility audits and providing changing places. Rob said there will be a wheelchair user starting work on a placement with Surrey Wildlife Trust, so Rob will tap into her knowledge. An all-terrain wheelchair is available at Box Hill. Surrey County Council is always looking at removing barriers on their land.
- 7.5 Ian said that it is important with an aging society to make access easier. Gates should allow access to be easier for users, while also preventing undesirable access. Claire said that large mobility kissing gates allow tramper access with a RADAR key. The problem is the space required makes these difficult to install – they are usually wider than the legal width and landowners with grazing animals are concerned. They are heavy to install so they can't really be put in by volunteers, and are also very expensive.
- 7.6 Penny asked when the new funding mentioned in the presentation would come. Rob said that it should be announced in December.
- 7.7 Claire said that in the Countryside Access team they are looking at areas with or potential circular routes where gates could be removed. Where these routes on Surrey County Council Countryside Estate Land this is easier to do than across farming land. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) is used to help decide routes. The Annual Report will mention any improvements that have been carried out that were included in the ROWIP.
- 7.8 Rob said that he would like people who are members of SCAF to also join the Surrey Hills User Groups when they are back up and running. There are several members who were involved with various groups when they were running before.

## **8. Forward Plan**

8.1 The forward plan was discussed and amended accordingly.

8.2 Suggestion for the forward plan included:

- Add Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan – Claire suggested contacting Lawrie Baker at Surrey County Council.

## 9. Outstanding consultations

9.1 Outstanding consultations were noted.

## 10. Any other Business / urgent questions

10.1 John said that there is a joint Trail Riders Fellowship and police engagement day on 23 July at Sandy Lane.

10.2 Claire said that there is a level crossing in Ashtead that Surrey County Council refused a closure for after a fatality. Network Rail need to come up with another solution.

10.3 Penny asked when Giant Hogweed is sprayed. Claire said that it is for the landowner to deal with usually. Countryside Access sprays it when they are aware of it and there is no landowner. When the Giant Hogweed gets even bigger it is more effective to inject the stems with herbicide. Claire is aware that there has been spraying where it is a problem along the A24.

10.4 Elliot said that there is a meeting between different Local Access Forums on 20 July.

10.5 Elliot said that the M25/A3 junction works will begin soon. There are presentations regarding the works on the Highways England website.

10.6 Elliot said that the Ramblers are supporting events for Refugees to get out into the countryside.

10.7 Corinna asked Claire if the Countryside Access Team is fully staffed yet. Claire said that it isn't – there are four posts being advertised at the moment. It is difficult to get any staff at the moment. Claire offered to circulate an organisational chart showing all the posts and new posts that have recently been created.

**Action** - Joanne to circulate the organisation chart to members.

10.8 Corinna asked Claire about Trigg Street as nothing seems to be happening at the moment. Claire said she is waiting for a new meeting to confirm the funding.

10.9 Ian said that the Vanguard Way is mostly in Sussex – Elliot said that some of it runs through Surrey and the Graham Butler (former SCAF Chairman) gates are in the Surrey section.

10.10 Ian asked if it is possible to object to a planning application for fracking if it would result in a historic path that isn't on the definitive map being lost. Claire said that if it's not on the definitive map it isn't a legally recorded right of way.

10.11 Peter said that there is a tramper available at Newlands Corner and there is also an accessible circular walk there.

- 10.12 Peter said that a 9-mile circular walk in east and West Horsley has been upgraded for the jubilee and is accessible.
- 10.13 Peter said that there are maps for the M23/A3 improvement plans available at Ockham Bites café.
- 10.14 Peter said that there appears to be a barrier in the plans for the new Crockcrow Green Bridge that will be built over the A3 and asked if that was the case. Claire said that any new Rights of Way created as part of this scheme will become the responsibility of Surrey County Council (SCC) to maintain. Peter asked if SCC had the resources to do this. Claire said that it would be the Countryside Estate Team that would look after them as they link to their sites.

## **11. Dates of next meeting**

- 11.1 17 October 2022 1.30pm  
Venue to be confirmed