



## Hertfordshire Local Access Forum



---

### The 29th Local Access Forum held at University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, on 10th March 2011

- Members present:** Liddy Lawrence - Chair  
Norman Jones – LAF member  
Robert Bolt – LAF member  
Debbie Hougie– LAF member  
Lynn Myland – LAF member
- Officers present:** Bob Fenton – Countryside Access Team Leader (RoW)  
Richard Cuthbert – Head of RoW  
Anna Mangini – LAF Secretary
- Public:** Attended by twenty-one (21) members of the public
- Apologies:** Members: Bill Storey; Rosemary Gilligan; Diana Collingridge; Tim Reagan; Roger Thomas; Tony Ferrari

#### 2. Minutes & matters arising

- Nothing to report

#### 3. Members updates

- NJ attended the **Green Infrastructure and Chilterns Conference**, at the latter Mike Furness, Waymark editor, gave a useful talk on Forestry;
- NJ mentioned LAF recent visit to the Ver Valley which cleared-up a lot of the questions raised at the last meeting by the talk the LAF was given. Some problems still exist in the Bedfordshire area. NJ reported that the next issue of Stile, the Ramblers magazine for our area would contain an article on the Ver Valley Walk. He had got a copy of the draft of the leaflet showing one of the walks.;
- DH apologised for not being very available in recent months, this was due to her involvement with the Board of the Friends of **Aldenham Country Rescue Park** and the Big Society, which involved almost daily meetings taking a lot of her time. The friends are putting together a bid proposal and plan by the 8<sup>th</sup> April to retain the park;
- LM had a very productive meeting with members of **Heartwood Forest, Woodland Trust**, P Escritt, J Thornton and J Featherstone;
- **Ellenbrook Fields** – LM reported that the area is now officially open to the public and she visited it with JT. LM has sent a letter to JT expressing some concerns regarding access issues. It seems a new link is going to be created, which would complete the connection between Hatfield and St Albans. Questions were asked about the management of the area in future and details are not yet available (*see item 5 below for more*);

#### 4. Presentation by Mark Weston, BHS – Equestrian Access in Hertfordshire

Mr Weston- Director of Access, Welfare and Safety - gave the LAF a comprehensive outlook on the numbers of members and work undertaken by BHS. One of the main objectives of the BHS is to promote, protect and preserve rights of way and access for ridden and driven horses over a multitude of ways.

Mr Weston explained the equestrian sector has a large number of riders and it is the largest sporting employer in UK, directly or indirectly; in Hertfordshire alone there are in excess of 14,000 horses - who contribute £43 million to the local economy.

One of the aims of the BHS is to expand the Open Access Land available to riders and carriage drivers. In Hertfordshire only 29% of the 3,100 kilometres is open to horse-riders and only 9% to carriage drivers.

Because of lack of connections in the network, and therefore lack of circular routes of at least 3 miles, horse riders use highway roads which are not ideal for anyone concerned: horses, riders, motorised vehicles and other users.

Another one of the aims of the BHS is to keep track of any incidents involving horse-riders occurring in UK; for this purpose a new website: [www.horseaccidents.org.uk](http://www.horseaccidents.org.uk) has recently been launched by the Society in order to encourage riders to report incidents and to help the Society to gain an accurate and detailed record. In the last few months since its launch, the website has proved its efficiency and shown an increase in figures for incidents involving dog attacks and road accidents.

One problem becoming more and more frequent is the use of 'bird-scare' guns by farmers. The audience called for pre-warnings in order to alert riders and not to scare horses and have serious incidents occurring.

BHS strongly advocates safety and encourage riders to wear high visibility gear on themselves and their horses. BHS is also campaigning for the adoption of new 'Access for All' signs and is closely working with RoW in Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties to increase access for riders.

LAF members had submitted, prior to the meeting, a series of questions to Mr Weston, and these were comprehensively answered during the presentation (see last 12 pages of his presentation on our web-pages: Item 4 - <http://www.hertslaf.org.uk/publicmeetings.htm>)

#### 5. RoW and Access News

A bid for **LSTF** funds is being developed focusing on St Albans, HH and Watford (Tranche 3) to continue on the theme started last year and developing a link between these places. LAF could help in suggesting new links that HCC / RoW would welcome.

There is no update on the **SRFI** appeal at Park Street.

The **HS2** railway line plan, at the border with Hertfordshire near Rickmansworth, has been proposed (for Plan see App3 of Item 5 / Papers on website <http://www.hertslaf.org.uk/publicmeetings.htm>).

Review of **Policies & Procedures**: a paper has been taken to the Development Control Committee, covering an update of all Rights of Way Service policies.

Is the future more in the hands of the **Big Society**? It might end up being seen as detrimental, to have a negative impact on volunteering and take away from cultural schemes (i.e. RoW helpers).

The recent **cuts in Budget** will reflect in the maintenance of RoW in Herts and we'll see a reduction of the mowing schedule, on the current 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the network, to two cuts instead of the 3 done in previous years.

Welcome news on the project update for **RoWIP**: the capital was not cut as much as expected due to some Member lobbying and it now stands at £43k for RoWIP, down from the £68k.

There have been positive developments at **Ellenbrook Fields**, where a 450 acre site between Coopers Green Lane, St Albans Road and the BT Test Centre site is to be managed for public access and flora / fauna, subject to a management plan with limited conservation grazing.

**Heartwood**: Car Park Entrance & Footpath 32 - Plan has now been agreed with Herts Highways, St Albans DC and Rights of Way. This will establish a much wider Definitive path width at the car park entrance, approaching 20 meters wide. The Woodland Trust have made it clear, on a number of occasions, they intend to allow horse use of this route and to eventually upgrade it to Bridleway. The increased width and work at the junction is in preparation for its eventual up-grade to bridleway.

**Oaklands**: The college major re-development scheme did not go ahead due to lack of funding, the college have put in a smaller application and LAF need to keep an eye on this as the rights of way improvements tied to the original major plan will not go ahead and no rights of way improvements have been included in the smaller plan.

**Water Lane, Wheathampstead (Ayot Estate)**: Lambert Smith Hampton, appointed as HCC Agent, have started negotiation of a long lease on a strip of field edge alongside Water End Lane, from the improved Highway verge (Marford Road) to Water End Ford and Bridleway 18 Wheathampstead. The Land owner and HCC Officers have agreed in principle and the matter has been passed to Lambert Smith Hampton (Lawrence Slater) to agree a valuation of land and formalise the lease detail. Lease should be in the region of 25/35 years in length.

**Bamville Farm Harpenden**: The route connects Cross Lane via Mud lane (BOAT 1) with Ayes End Lane and via Bridleway 9 Woodland Trust site. Lawrence Slater has agreed with the Dickinson's family certain changes to their tenancy that will allow the new permissive bridleway to go ahead. HCC, as landowner, require fences to be erected to divide the path from the cultivated land and gates and bollards at the junctions with Cross and Mud Lanes as part of this work. The Dickinson's have left 3-4m wide grassy path along the agreed route to naturalise; the area is well drained and, once fencing and gate/bollard work has been put in place, the route will be formally opened.

**Sale of Forestry Commission woods**, put on hold as Government is consulting further. Hertfordshire has Bramfield Woods (previously leased to FC) which could possibly be at risk of reduced access now back in private owners' control. The access has already been reduced, although it is likely that this is due to logging and

maintenance that has been happening on site.*[please read additional information attached at the end]*.

On grazing: **Chorleywood Common** is still an ongoing issue. The Parish Council is going to be written to and asked to improve the 'squeeze gaps' as these have not followed the guidelines given by CMS. It was also suggested to write to Defra to challenge their decision to allow 'temporary' fencing, which in places, has been erected as permanent fencing.

## **6. Any other business**

DH asked for any information or news on what is happening with Hertsmere Greenways and was told by RC that the post for the Greenways officer (P Simon) will come to an end in April 2011. However there is c£500-600k to be used in Hertsmere and part of St Albans (where they overlap/are adjoining) to improve the Greenways network. Discussions are still underway on who will manage this fund to make improvements.

**The meeting closed at 21.50.**

**Next Public Meeting on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2011.**

My family had leased the **Bramfield Woodlands** (about 500 acres) to the Forestry Commission in the late 1940s on a 999 year lease. About two years ago the Forestry Commission wrote to me asking whether we would like to buy them out of their leasehold interest and this we did, hence the woodlands now being in hand. There is a network of statutory rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, etc) throughout the woodlands, the status of which is not changed as a result of our acquisition (and this would also have been the case had the Forestry Commission proceeded with their proposed sale of other woodlands and forests elsewhere in the country which was aborted).

The statutory rights of way at Bramfield are supplemented by some 6 metre strips around fields under the ELS (now HLS) so people can walk/ride on a circular route; there are also permissive footpaths within the woodlands but these are clearly signboarded and we reserve the right to close them from time to time in the interests of wildlife conservation and/or public safety whilst forestry operations are in progress.

Much work has been done to date in woodland management and a lot of work remains to be done and you will see considerable progress during the forthcoming summer and throughout 2012. This will mainly consist of felling mature conifers and thinning half-grown conifer plantations and where there is a mixture of hardwood and softwood there will be a thinning operation to take out the softwood to favour the hardwood. Clear felled areas will be replaced either by natural regeneration or some fresh planting, or a bit of each. Whilst doing so we are putting much more emphasis on promoting the environmental aspect of forestry management by creating wide rides and grassy areas, recreating ponds and re-establishing hedgerows around the perimeters of the woodlands.

All work has been pre-consented by the Forestry Commission and we have a group of highly reliable contractors who are well managed by our Forestry Manager, advised by a Forestry Consultant.

All in all I consider that Bramfield Woods are being well managed, not only in the forestry sense but also in terms of promoting biodiversity, maintaining a high aesthetic value within the area whilst maintaining public access and hopefully enhancing the enjoyment of visiting the woodlands.

I trust the above sufficiently answers the points.

Yours sincerely  
Ralph  
Ralph Abel Smith

---