



Hertfordshire Local Access Forum



The 30th Local Access Forum held at University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, on 15th June 2011

LAF Members present: Liddy Lawrence – Chair
Norman Jones
Robert Bolt
Debbie Hougie
Lynn Myland
Bill Storey
Diana Collingridge
Roger Thomas – Vice-Chair
Tony Ferrari

Officers present: Richard Cuthbert – Head of RoW
Anna Mangini – LAF Secretary

Public: Attended by eight (8) members of the public

Apologies: LAF Members: Rosemary Gilligan
Bob Fenton – Countryside Access Team Leader (RoW)

2. Minutes & matters arising

- LM:
 - **Oakland College – College** – Planning application has been approved by St Albans District Council and Access improvements suggested by various user groups and Rights of Way have not been included. LAF and RoW need to monitor this closely as further applications from Oaklands are in the pipeline and Access improvements should be offered through 106.
 - **Heartwood – a 2nd meeting has tak^{en} place** and a Sub group for Access has formed with representatives from various groups/associations;
 - **Ellenbrook Park** – would be useful to know who is in charge of Management Plan, ahead of LAF Field Trip in September;
 - **Chorleywood Common** – Representations due by 24.06.11. LAF to make representation.

3. Members updates

- TF was contacted by Herts Constabulary as a 'responsible 4x4 owner' and has been in dialogue with Chief Constable for Rural Policing and talked about access issues. The police are also keen to talk with other like-minded people. The Chief Constable email will be added to HertsLAF distribution list;
- RB mentioned that the Ver Valley Society has opened the full route and will be walking it from start to finish on 19th June. Leaflets for the walks are now

ready and have been received positively. The route has been enhanced with three ornate benches;

- NJ: Ely LAF conference in March was very interesting with reports from Ralph Barnett of Natural England (NE) and his mention of the NE Corporate Plan 2011-15; Steve Jenkinson mentioned of the Red Tape challenge, where the review of Statutory Duties placed on Local Governments is at the forefront. RC mentioned this is an ongoing consultation;
- LL not been able to get a name for someone from NE to come and talk to us on Coastal Access;
- LM: noted that the LAF did not seem to have been included in a consultation on some regulations for coastal access which she became aware of. LL further added that the LAF had not been consulted on the route of the first section of the coastal path. It seemed Herts LAF would not be consulted on these aspects;
- LL reported that she had got not success in attempts to get a commitment to resurrect the EAF. She has also been in contact with a charity in North London and the person in charge is happy to provide info/material as well as coming to talk to us (September speaker?);
- RC reported on the resignation of one of the HertsLAF members: Tim Regan, who sent a message and apologised for not being able to be as present to meetings as he would have liked.

Fiona Taylor from Natural England was present and introduced herself.

'NE had undergone a massive restructuring in recent months with budget reduced by 30% and 400 staff lost. Her role in NE is to be involved with Access and Engagement and she is keen to bring access to people while still allowing for development and housing to go ahead. Fiona offered her help and support to LAF and she is happy to be contacted if anything is needed.

4. Presentation on Biodiversity and Access by Graham Goodall – Senior Ecologist - HBRC, HCC

Biodiversity is a relatively new word as until the late 50s/early 60s a fairly good balance existed in our countryside. With the introduction of agri-chemicals and large machinery a massive change happened in the agricultural system which contributed to a shift in the natural balance. With the East of England being predominantly arable land, this has endangered the existence of wildlife.

Graham outlined the current state of most common habitats.

Woodlands have changed dramatically and are much more dense than used to be up to 100 years ago, as they were now much more heavily managed. They were made up mainly of oaks and hornbeams, oaks were standing trees and hornbeam would be coppiced. During Henry VIII time deer were managed in deer parks and kept out of woodlands. Nowadays large numbers of Fallow and Muntjac deer are present in woodland and graze out the ground vegetation. The Great Spotted Woodpecker population has expanded and it is a frequent visitor to our gardens. Tawny Owls are on the increase and Song Thrushes are too.

Woods provide good access opportunities and encourage people to enjoy the natural environment. Woodland rides should be wide e.g. 1.5 times the height of the trees either side. This allows for tall trees to merge into lower shrubs then lower undergrowth, which encourages wildlife and is easier to the eye when walking

through rather than having a 'wall' of vegetation. People are encouraged to go in via certain routes and enjoy the habitat without excessively disturbing wildlife.

Scrubland is usually seen negatively; it is usually cut down. Four years ago at a national conference in Reading, scrub was dealt with for the first time. It was presented that it should be allowed to grow and coppiced on rotation to benefit wildlife. Sites that are managed appropriately have seen the reappearance of the Nightingale, that had declined since woodlands became unmanaged. The Lee Valley is a good example of the reintroduction of scrubland and the positive effects of it for wildlife.

Thanks to better management of the countryside, in recent years, we have seen the reappearance in Hertfordshire of Red Kites and Buzzards which are now more common than Kestrels.

Broxbourne Woods has heather and acid grassland as well as trees. Over the years the woods had been planted with conifers which are now gradually being removed (after duly informing the public) to bring back the native vegetation and wildlife (i.e. slow worms have been seen again). Until 300/400 years ago pigs used to graze in these woods, now there is a project for fencing some of the area to introduce Longhorn Cattle. It is anticipated that the management will re-create Wood Pasture and acid grassland, which could encourage the Tree Pipit and Woodlarks, both ground nesting birds, to breed. The cutting of trees and vegetation around the ponds will be dealt by hand rather than machinery in order to protect the populations of Great Crested Newts, Smooth and Palmate newts and grass snakes.

Knebworth Park is a good example of how deer used to be managed at the time of Henry VIII and kept out of woodland.

Another issue about access and managing of woodlands and areas accessible by the public, is how to deal with dead trees. Dangerous trees can be a H&S issue to the public however they can also provide cover to bats. In these cases trees are cut in Autumn and the 'soft fell' system is applied whereby each branch is cut and gently lowered to the ground and inspected for bats in order to minimise disturbance.

Farmers are encouraged not to cut hedgerows every year and allow plants to flower and fruit. A 3-4 year cycle is preferred and the hedges grow 2-3m high. This encourages ground vegetation and in turn ground nesting/breeding wildlife.

Grassland is very important and it encourages the public to walk. Examples of good management are seen at Ellenbrook Park in Hatfield and Pishiobury Park in Sawbridgeworth where grazing Longhorn cattle are cohabiting with the public and represent a good example of managing public open space.

The Pasque Flower is the county flower for Hertfordshire. It can be seen around April in an area of Therfield Heath, near Royston. The site is also good for butterflies.

The Baldock Bypass is a good example of development and preservation of the habitat. £40,000 was spent on wild flower seeds and grasses that were planted after the works were completed. This year marks the 5th year of monitoring of the area and end of the scheme. During the road works started tunnels were constructed for Badgers and tests confirmed their intended use within days of being

put in place. Deer and badger fences have been placed deeply in the ground around the highway and they have prevented any accidents. The chalky soils and the planted wildflowers/grasses have encouraged butterflies.

Conservationists, scientists and all involved in designing areas to reintroduce birds or animals extinct to this county, need also to consider access, so that both can cohabit in harmony.

Conservationists and scientists are involved in designing areas to enhance the populations of birds and animals; none more so than at Panshanger Park. The needs of the public are also being considered, so that both can cohabit and are not exclusive of each other.

Graham's presentation was instructive as well as fascinating. It made us all aware – in case we had not already realised it – of how lucky we are to live in Hertfordshire and of how much is on our doorstep, which we need to be aware and protect at the same time as enjoying it (for more information and data see Item 4 on the HertsLAF's webpages [<http://www.hertslaf.org.uk/publicmeetings.htm>]).

5. Herts RoW GPG – maintaining it on the web vs. use of the National GPG

RC explained that, at the moment, it takes too much time to update and maintain the RoW GPG website. His proposal is to use the National GPG.

Presently to maintain the RoW GPG takes a lot of time. Either RC, BF or RER need to research and write each piece, which then needs to be added to the website by David Bambury (RoW Technical Officer) The works doesn't end there though. They also have to keep a keen eye on all of the regulations and make sure they are constantly updated or RoW could be liable. This makes a large demand on time that could be otherwise used.

When The National GPG was created it used and copied large part of the RoW' site as its base and has since also added extra bits to make it more complete and relevant to most part of the country.

Presently RoW receives only 2-3 requests a year and these could be, and are, dealt efficiently and directly by sending specific updating to the requester.

Hertfordshire RoW would have its own version that would cover the gaps left by the National GPG and that could appear alongside other counties' version on the National one (i.e. Gating order in Liverpool very different from one in Herts; they would be presented side by side and you choose the more relevant one and adapt it to your own reality/needs).

The question RC put to the LAF Members was: 'would you be happy to see RoW GPG dropped in favour of efficiency savings'?

It was put to the vote and LAF Members **voted unanimously in favour of going National.**

6. RoW and Access News

Natural Environment White Paper – LM read it and found a couple of mentions on RoW. In particular she read a quote: “...*Clear, well-maintained paths and bridleways are important to give people access to the natural environment and can be enjoyed by cyclists, walkers and horse riders. There is considerable scope to improve and extend this network, for example through Local Access Forums and Rights of Way Improvement Plans. We will make it easier for local communities and civil society groups to get involved in developing and maintaining networks of paths and accessible green space...*”

British Waterways/EA Merger consultation: information on Paper 6 taken directly from their websites: www.defra.gov.uk or www.britishwaterways.org

Access Team: Mowing contracts – there is a degree of settling in with new contractors.

Strategic Land Use Planning (SLUP) Unit has taken a strong approach with Lafarge, its development and what they want in **Panshanger**. RoW has met with them (SLUP) and they were very happy to take forward the proposals received. [HertsLAF members will be visiting the site and hope to meet with a Lafarge representative early next year as part of their Winter Field Trip].

Budget: NJ had raised a question by email about the published LTP performance figure and show reduced targets over several years into the future. RC explained that the LTP figures show a lowering in the targets due to the decreased budget and assumes the budget in future years (beyond the current three years) will not improve. However if available funds increase then both budgets and targets will be reviewed in years to come.

DM Team: the Fast Track scheme applied to Diversion orders - whereby the land-owners pay for the work of carrying out the consultation- is progressing well, has seen several cases been taken up and will produce some ameliorations to the path' system.

A list of Modification cases is also online and TF asked for a 'search facility'. RC explained that Serco is now responsible for web developments and as such this is now a chargeable service. As RC has only recently learnt of this, his budget this year did not take into account for web development. Two options: wait for another year and allocate money or borrow it from another area i.e. maintenance. LAF to advise.

7. Any other business

- RC will answer J Featherstone's email about his concerns on the difficulty of continuity in work and agreements/information being lost when officers leave RoW. RC will circulate his reply to LAF members too.
- DH updated members on recent developments at **Aldenham Country Park**. Several bids were received, 5 were selected for interviews and now 3 remain. Due Diligence and other papers are being checked and by 20/25th July a decision will be made. In the meantime 2 of the 3 finalist bids have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Friends of ACP. The chosen bid will manage the park alongside the Friends for the next 5-10 years The remaining bids are from:

- Tim Waygood, Church Farm, Ardeley
- Tim Harris - Enfield
- Melsop Farm Park - Norfolk

The park will be leased. Presently there are still some access problems (with the path over the dam) and the lake is not part of the lease.

- RC reported that both Chair and Vice-Chair are prepared to stand for another 3 years. A vote took place:
 - For the Chair - Liddy Lawrence: proposed by Tony Ferrari, seconded by Debbie Hougie;
 - For the Vice-Chair - Roger Thomas: proposed by Norman Jones and seconded by Robert Bolt.

Congratulation to both and thank you for your hard work and support to the LAF.

- New LAF members join the group for 1 year at the end of which they are asked if they like to continue for another 2 years. Of last year two new members, Robert Bolt has agreed to stand for another two years. Tim Regan has declined and resigned (see also above).
- Public Meetings Members **Quorum** number: In case of decisions to be made a vote is to be cast by LAF Members. All present members (9) voted in favour for **50%+1 of membership number to form a quorum.**

The meeting closed at 21.45.

Next Public Meeting on Tuesday 20th September 2011.