



Hertfordshire Local Access Forum



The 31st Local Access Forum held at University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, on 20th September 2011

LAF Members present: Liddy Lawrence – Chair
Norman Jones
Rosemary Gilligan
Debbie Hougie
Lynn Myland
Diana Collingridge
Roger Thomas – Vice-Chair
Tony Ferrari

Officers present: Bob Fenton – Countryside Access Team Leader (RoW)
Anna Mangini – LAF Secretary

Public: Attended by five (5) members of the public

Apologies: LAF Members: Robert Bolt, Bill Storey
Richard Cuthbert – Head of RoW

2. Minutes & matters arising

- **RG:** Hertsmere – mentioned that a similar occurrence to Oaklands College is happening in Hertsmere, whereby blocks of flats are erected too close to rights of way. How does this happen? Planning application should be checked by RoW staff. BF confirmed that last year 700 applications for planning went through the RoW Unit and most had been checked by staff. Problem occurs when erection of buildings takes 1-2 yrs from application and in the meantime a path that might not have been registered at the time of the application has finally made it to be official.
RG explained that in Hertsmere they now have a system where the work needs to be signed off as approved at the end of the process, allowing for any errors to be rectified before anything is signed off and S106 money released.
- **TF** – confirmed the name of the Chief Constable in Hertfordshire as Chris Miller;
- **NJ** – Ramblers are pushing very hard on Coastal Access

3. Members updates

- DH updated on Aldenham Country Park. She is now the representative of the Aldenham Country Park Trustees Ltd (ACPT). Tim Waygood and a partner from Church Farm in Ardeley, Stevenage have won the lease to the park and will sign a contract in Jan 2012, due diligence is under way. They will work to maintain and improve access to the park. Furthermore they have also agreed with the ACPT to work and help the Trustees to implement the

- project's objectives to develop the Greenway at Aldenham, as well as the areas of Education, Conservation and public access maintained at all times;
- NJ – LNP (Local Nature Partnership) seems directly connected to follow Herts Environmental Forum;
 - NJ - confirmed that the fencing at Bricketwood Common has been approved by the Inspector at PINS, which produced an exhaustive report analysing all aspects of the proposed fencing and objections;
 - RG – LAF can make an impact more than ever before by suggesting projects and influencing RoW officers where they have lost manpower (e.g. in Hertsmere);
 - LM - Heartwood Forest, 3rd meeting of the committee has taken place. St Albans DC will send a representative from the Planning Dept to take part in future meetings.
 - LM – Ellenbrook Fields: Following LAF's visit on 14th September 2011, Tom Williams has helped answer a lot of questions that she had raised in her letter to Julian Thornton dated 22nd November 2010 following her initial site visit with J Thornton (HCC). LM will review the list and re-circulate it updated to RoW/HCC in order for them to forward to Goodman for answer/clarify on unanswered points.
 - TF - has been carrying out a survey of routes with vehicular rights (BOATs) in Hertfordshire. There are ca. 150 routes in total. Most have been found to be in robust health, properly signposted and surfaced. He will produce a report when finished and also added that Hertfordshire is in a better position than other counties on these.
 - TF - mentioned the Greenline Association whose services have been sought after by neighbouring counties (i.e. Suffolk) because they can offer manual labour to do maintenance & resurfacing work;
 - LL – LAF Chairs meeting is to take place during Autumn 2011 and she is particularly interested as ever in seeing that the LAF influence the workings of the Government.

4. Presentation: Nature on Prescriptions? Linking Health & the Environment by Debbie Pearlman-Hougie – Senior Lecturer in Rural Geography, UH

Debbie's talk on linking healthy living with the environment and children spurred a lot of interest and comments at the end. A very hot and interesting topic.

Environment encompasses all open spaces, being they urban fringe, back gardens or large fields in open countryside. Natural England (NE) carried out a survey, called Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment – MENE) which looked at the day to day use and enjoyment of the natural environment, the lack of engagement and contact with nature that is happening more and more in today's society and the possible loss for future generations of this tradition/learning.

There have been various studies linking the environment with a positive health outcome. A sedentary and indoor lifestyle (as seen often in the urban population where the daily contact with nature is diminishing all the time in favour of computer games and TV) has been directly connected to having a negative impact in our lives and causing, e.g. obesity and M.E.

"...studies are suggestive that natural environments may have direct and positive impacts on health and well-being" - D Bowler, 2010

Physical activity in the outdoors has huge benefits on health. Heart activity rate increases when doing something outside and so does enjoyment. Activities taken outside are enhanced when taken in green spaces. A study ascertained outdoor activities such as:

- Fishing and boating on the canal will burn 100 cal an hour;
- Walking 300 cal an hour and cycling and conservation work will burn 600 cal an hour.
- Compared to walking on a treadmill indoor the same type of activity undertaken outdoor in a green space will be much more effective (reducing blood pressure, cholesterol and helping with weight management).

Adults are encouraged to exercise regularly for 30 minutes, 5 times a week, whilst for children it doubles to 60 minutes, 5 times a week. The reality is far from this, with outdoor activity – if existing – concentrated at weekends.

Studies have shown that mental health patients and patients recovering from surgery put in contact with nature will recover more quickly, as stress levels and fatigue are reduced, moods are enhanced and mental health is replenished.

Being near green spaces and water are seen as very beneficial aspects. (We were told by a member of the public that there is a resurgence of wild swimming).

The website: www.greenexercise.org/index.htm gives ideas of how to connect with green spaces.

Another part of Debbie's study showed that there is an increase of inactivity in children as well as lack of being outdoors. This inactivity is already creating generations of young people with chronic diseases. Furthermore there is an acute risk of disengagement from nature of children and of future generations. The indoor is somehow become the 'safer' option.

This has also put pressure on how to be a parent. Parents are increasingly afraid their children will be kidnapped, abused, get muddy or catch germs if let wandering in the outside environment. In the space of 3 generations children have gone from freely roaming the countryside to being restricted to their back garden, if that lucky. Statistics show that fewer children are injured when playing outside than when playing football and other activities at school recognised as safe. We are bubble wrapping our kids, the new generations.

A study undertaken by DP-H showed that in Hertfordshire middle-class children's wish-list were: wanting to get lost, be able to visit mystical places and go to a picnic. Fewer and fewer parents and adults are able to read OS maps and be confident in going out and use their skills to negotiate a walk, preferring to use 'safe' outdoor spaces like managed parks on the fringes of towns [it seems that only 2% of the population can read a map nowadays and feel confident to use it for practical purposes]. This study will shortly be published by DP-H.

More and more organisations are gearing up to help parents and children to reclaim the countryside and learn to enjoy it.

- Walking the way 2 health (BHF & NE) a scheme for adults;
- Walk4Life (adult & children)
- The Ramblers have implemented a scheme aimed at teaching parents and children how to use OS maps and being able to take a walk across a field that has a path, which they did not know they could do before;
- BCTV (Green Gym) conservation walks;

- Walking Prescription Scheme (doctors prescribing walks rather than pills);
- Green Exercise (NE has 8 different projects);

www.greenexercise.org

“...such physical inactivity tracks from childhood and is a key risk factor in many chronic diseases of later life...” – “dose responses for both intensity and duration showed large benefits from short engagements in green exercise, and then diminishing but positive returns.” – J Barton & J Pretty, 2010

More and more studies have highlighted the need for a cultural shift. To be effective it needs to happen in all aspects of life: transport policy, urban design, parenting style, patients’ expectations of the medical profession...

Other projects that have been slowly and gradually happening around UK and often connected with schools are:

- ‘Forest Schools’ (RT mentioned one organised by the Boxmoor Trust and only available to children up to 4th grade!);
- Learning outside the classroom;
- Healing and therapy gardens - created on or near hospital grounds;
- NT outdoor nation – on how to run a picnic among other activities;
- Adventure Education (FSC);
- ‘Mud between your Toes’ projects run by the Eden projects, in Anglesey, where people walk bare-feet;

these are all good schemes to help children to re-engage with nature.

One of the members of the public reminded us that the Scouts, Girl Guides and the Duke of Edinburgh projects have been helping generations of children to enjoy nature and the environment.

5. RoWIP, Greenways and more in Hertsmere, with maps - RoW

During the break LAF members and public examined maps (paper and online) of the area of Hertsmere highlighting possible new links and connections to investigate.

As the meeting resumed there were questions by members with regard to the previous RoWIP lists. LM, DC & RT had visited a number of sites and recorded Improvements which could be carried out on the original plan and suggested that we should see an update on the status and progress of the initial RoWIP.

Both LM and DC were concerned that by adding new items and suggestions to the list it would create a further backlog and were reluctant to add to it.

BF encouraged the addition of new projects saying that this exercise helps RoW identify and prioritise projects, according to the resources available. He also mentioned that having items on the list provided a ‘living document’ that created a target and was of help in drawing money from S106.

RT suggested that in the near future he’d like to see a discussion on ‘Permissive ways’. Identifying areas and paths that could be connected by a permissive way and help make more use of the area. The topic will form part of the agenda at a future meeting.

6. RoW and Access News

BF highlighted some of the current challenges faced by RoW.

Mowing: new regulations have forced them to have new contractors. Whilst there has been a reduction in costs, the new contractors have to be checked and made sure they work according to the specifications. One of the three new contractors has caused some concerns and will hopefully come up to the task with the 2nd of the cuts. This year there has been a reduction to two cuts (rather than the 3 in previous years). Surprisingly there have been very few complaints from the public (possibly more tolerant due to cuts) (or as there has been no summer perhaps less inclined to be in the outdoors. AM) which has not been helpful to RoW.

Panshanger: there has been a lot of activity. Lafarge is keen and willing to get it right. The balance between access and biodiversity will be challenging to achieve. BF requests (musts, coulds and good ifs) have been all accepted. Well done Bob! The LAF is planning a Field Trip to Panshanger in January.

Rickmansworth: a petition of 100 names has put a temporary halt to the swapping of some steps for a ramp on a path near a Tesco supermarket. Great opposition has been put by local residents who seem oblivious to the need for access by all to paths. LAF members were not happy at this and will rally around to generate enough support and comments from user groups.

A full report on RoW and DM happenings during the summer is downloadable at: <http://www.hertslaf.org.uk/public%20meetings.htm> (see LAF 31st Meeting, Item 6).

7. Any other business

- NJ - consultation on Village Green (VG)s. The changes being consulted on would tighten the rules for a successful application to create a VG. Often the creation/application for a VG is seen as a way to stop development of the land and the government seems to want to put a stop to it by creating a set of measures, which they would hope to apply as a package, which would operate when an application for a new VG was being considered. TF confirmed that years ago it was used to stop the development at Goffs Oak (Metropolitan underground line, maintenance depot) and where the VG consisted of a school football pitch at Woodcock Hill, Elstree (housing development). DC suggested that landowners would be reluctant to grant permission for use of land as a football pitch if there was the risk of being subject to applications to become VG. BF reassured that any land that is 'rented' is not liable to have an application for a VG placed upon it. NJ urged LAF members to respond to the consultation.

Any more AOB to be sent via email. None received.

The meeting closed at 21.45.

Next Public Meeting on Thursday 1st December 2011.