

Broads Authority

Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2010

Present

Dr Keith Bacon (Chairman)

Ms Liz Brooks	Mr Ray Walpole
Mrs Hattie Llewelyn-Davies	Mr George Saunders
Mr Graham Downing	Mr Gary Simons
Mr Tony Howes	Mr Alan Duce
Mr Nick Larkin	Mr Peter Medhurst
Mr Charles Swan	Mr Mike Flett
Mr Louis Baugh	Mrs Jo Lester
Mr Stephen Read	Mr Patrick Hacon

In Attendance

Mr Nick Sanderson – Head Countryside Ranger
Mr Adrian Clarke - the Broads Project Co-ordinator
Ms Lucy Harris – Head of Valley Management
Ms Jo Eames – Administrative Officer

Also in Attendance

Ms Sarah Abercrombie - Norfolk County Council
Mr David Falk – Suffolk County Council
Ms Diane Curtis – Natural England
Mr Ralph Barnett - Natural England

2/1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Chris Yardley and Ms Sarah Jenkinson.

2/2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2/3 Points of Information Arising from the Minutes

(1) Minute 1/7: Healthy Walks Publications

It was noted that Ray Walpole, Charles Swan and the Head Countryside Ranger attended the launch of the Coast Alive initiative and the healthy walks booklet for Great Yarmouth, which took place on 3 March 2010.

2/4 Angles Way Leaflet

Suffolk County Council's Countryside Access Development Manager reported that he had been working with the Head Countryside Ranger and Norfolk County Council's Head of Access Development to produce a map to promote the Angles Way as a long distance footpath. A3 size was chosen to enable the map to be folded neatly into a leaflet rack. The map included information relating to information centres, public transport, the built heritage, the working heritage, the historic landscape, wildlife and nature, market towns and the seasonality of the landscape. The Angles Way had been extended to the town of Thetford so that local residents could access the footpath.

20,000 maps would be printed and distributed to information centres, caravan parks and bed and breakfast establishments in the Waveney Valley. The map would also be available to download from the <http://www.discoversuffolk.org.uk/> website.

The long distance footpath had been way marked and an alternative route through Cobholm had been identified. Interpretation panels illustrating stories associated with the Angles Way would be installed in the future.

A launch for the map and the booklet would be organised, and it was hoped that this would enable links with Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Waveney District Council and "health walks partnerships" to be strengthened.

The Forum noted that the map had been nicely written and suggested that the Chairman of the Broads Tourism Forum be made aware of the booklet and the map.

The Forum questioned why car parks had not been identified on the map. The Access Development Manager stated that it was felt that including this information would have made the map difficult to read. It had therefore been decided that only the location of railway stations would be illustrated. However, access points had been identified in the booklet, which could be accessed via the <http://www.discoversuffolk.org.uk/> website.

The Countryside Access Development Manager agreed to circulate the map to the Forum for comment.

2/5 Best of Both Worlds

Natural England's Open Access and Access Network Mapping Adviser gave a presentation to the Forum regarding the 'Best of Both Worlds', a management approach to help increase opportunities for the responsible pursuit of adventure activities, outdoor sports and recreation, committed to the conservation of the sensitive environments in which they took place, to enable members to decide whether to include a link to this management tool on the Forum's web page.

2/6 Natural England Natural Health Service

Natural England's Team Leader: People and Access gave a presentation to the Forum regarding 'Our Natural Health Service' campaign, the central aim of which was to increase the number of people able to derive health benefits from regular contact with the natural environment. Natural England's current focus was to work with the Department for Health to increase the numbers of people in the region regularly walking as part of an accredited health walk scheme. Plans had also been compiled that showed where areas of accessible natural greenspace were most needed to maximise health benefits to local communities.

It was noted that the contact for the Forum, should members have any queries regarding the campaign, was the Walking for Health Schemes advisor for Norfolk and Suffolk, Samantha Wilkins on 0300 060 4542.

The Forum suggested that hospitals could promote the campaign within their waiting areas, which would raise awareness of it.

The Forum questioned access issues within National Nature Reserves. The Team Leader: People and Access stated that unless there was clear evidence of negative impact on a sensitive area, access would be maintained as far as possible.

Graham Downing stated that he felt that the Care Farming Initiative, which he was involved with was closely allied to this campaign. The Team Leader: People and Access, although aware of the initiative, had not been specifically involved with it, but was happy to find out more from Mr Downing.

2/7 National and Regional Local Access Forum Issues

(1) South Downs Rights of Way Improvement Plans

The Head Countryside Ranger reported that the tool developed by the South Downs National Park to monitor the progress of their Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIP) was impressive but unnecessary for the Forum's needs. He therefore suggested that members continue to use the RoWIP Action Plan updating system already produced.

The Head Countryside Ranger agreed to circulate the RoWIP to new members.

It was felt that the Action Plan was the most useful part of the RoWIP, therefore the Head Countryside Ranger also agreed to circulate an updated version of this to all members.

The Head Countryside Ranger noted that the RoWIP Action Plan could be accessed via a link on the Forum's web page.

Members agreed to discuss the current status and the future development of the Action Plan at the next meeting.

(2) **Vacancy for East of England Representative for England Access Forum**

The Forum was informed that there was currently only one representative from the Eastern region on the England Access Forum, which was Liddy Lawrence, from Hertfordshire Local Access Forum.

Debbie Houghie, also from Hertfordshire Local Access Forum, had offered to be the second Eastern region representative on the England Access Forum until another representative from one of the other Local Access Forums in the region came forward.

The Forum felt that it was important for a member from Norfolk or Suffolk to represent the Eastern region to prevent representation being localised.

The Forum nominated Peter Medhurst as a candidate to represent the Eastern region.

The Head Countryside Ranger agreed to contact the Local Access Forum Regional Support East of England to ascertain what being a Eastern region representative of the England Access Forum entailed, and to forward this information to Mr Medhurst.

2/8 Broads Forum Update

Peter Medhurst reported that the items discussed at the Broads Forum meeting on 11 February 2010 included the suggestion from the House of Lords to increase parish council representation on the Broads Forum, a presentation by the Chairman of the Broads Tourism Forum on a positive approach to promoting sustainable tourism in the Broads, information regarding the successful European funding grant the Broads Authority had received for Sustainable Tourism for Estuary Parks (STEP), eight projects identified under the Broads Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which would be carried out over the next five years and information on an initiative regarding the management of invasive species in Norfolk and the Broads.

Mr Medhurst noted that at the end of the meeting there was an opportunity to raise issues that could be forwarded to the Broads Authority through their representative if relevant, and suggested that members might wish to consider this for future Local Access Forum meetings (i.e. a specific agenda item to help Alan Duce, the current contact, identify points to raise).

It was noted that the Broads Forum's Chairman was always invited to attend the Broads Authority Committee meetings, to report back on Broads Forum matters.

Members suggested that the Chairman of the Broads Tourism Forum be invited to a future Local Access Forum meeting to give his presentation on promoting sustainable tourism in the Broads.

2/9 Broadland Flood Alleviation Project: Update on Access Enhancements

The Broads Projects Co-ordinator updated the Forum on the main enhancement schemes linked to the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project that were currently being worked on by Broads Authority and BESL officers.

As a result of negotiations an agreement had been reached to dedicate a new Public Right of Way (PRoW) along the realigned flood wall at Geldeston Marshes. The PRoW along the existing river wall would also be retained. BESL had pledged to upgrade this footpath to a good condition for the near future. This would create a circular walk with the new footpath. Interpretation would be installed on the new footpath. The Forum thanked the Broads Projects Co-ordinator for all his help in achieving this positive outcome.

The footpath creation agreement that had been sought between Horsefen Mill and Horsefen Bank had been agreed. Work would commence this summer. The Forum suggested that the Broads Projects Co-ordinator contact the relevant parish councils to inform them of the agreement.

Carlton Marshes easy access path had been completed, and would be open for Easter. It was noted that this RoWIP Action Plan objective had now been achieved. A formal opening of the path had been suggested.

Future BESL maintenance works would include raising the crest height of the flood defences by topping up. However, in some areas it might be more appropriate to create a footpath on top of the crest instead. The Broads Projects Co-ordinator therefore suggested that at the next meeting members might like to propose areas where this would be appropriate. It was noted that this could form part of the discussion regarding the future development of the RoWIP Action Plan.

The Broads Projects Co-ordinator informed members that he was now involved in the Mutford Lock land transfer with ABP, Suffolk County Council and Waveney District Council, and that the free jetty (Oulton Broad Free Quay) and the quayside were part of the transfer deal. A meeting to discuss safety issues would be taking place shortly with Waveney District Council.

2/10 Joint Local Access Forum Conference: 17 February 2010

It was noted that Keith Bacon, Ray Walpole, George Saunders, Liz Brooks, Chris Yardley, Stephen Read and the Head Countryside Ranger attended the Joint Local Access Forum Conference, which was held in Ely on 17 February 2010.

The programme included a presentation by Ray Walpole on the work of the Forum as well as discussions regarding setting up sub groups and linking with grass roots organisations.

This stimulated discussion between members on future work for their Forum. It was suggested that a good topic for a sub group for the Forum would be the Harnser's Way.

The Forum discussed the extent to which rights of way were publicised in the Broads.

The Forum also discussed the possibility of a sub group to update the Staithe Register, suggesting that this could be undertaken by a graduate or through collaboration between the Broads Authority and the Broads Society, as with the original Staithe Register of 1983.

2/11 Thorpe Marshes

The Head Countryside Ranger reported that the ownership of Thorpe Marshes, currently in the possession of Crown Point Estate, was under discussion.

However, included in this parcel of land was a section of river frontage outside the BESL project area, which interested parties had raised concerns about regarding erosion and mooring issues.

Thorpe Parish Council was keen for the site to become a nature area, but was concerned about accepting responsibility for the river frontage if they took out a lease for the site.

Norwich Fringe Project had produced a management plan for the site. One of the proposals included in the plan was to take out a lease for the site excluding the river frontage.

The Broads Authority could provide a volunteer wardening service and had suggested, due to current flooding difficulties, the creation of a seasonal permissive path across the marsh and a further access path alongside the railway line.

The Forum requested that a letter be written stating that members recognised the importance of this site and the preservation of access for the future.

The Head Countryside Ranger agreed to update the Forum on the progress of this issue.

2/12 Information Updates

(1) Herringfleet Smock Mill

The Head Countryside Ranger agreed to pursue this item as he had not been able to provide the Forum with information regarding the future of the Mill following Suffolk County Council's funding withdrawal.

(2) South Fen

Keith Bacon reported that the aim of this project was to create a range of fen habitats from very wet swamp communities through to typical Broadland mixed fens and finally to species-rich fen meadows. The wetland would be created by raising water levels along with alterations to the grazing regime. The project area was an area of marsh between the North Walsham and Dilham Canal, and the IDB main drain, just south of East Ruston.

This simple scheme had been granted planning approval following extensive public consultation and design modification to provide additional flood storage capacity.

During the re-design, the raising of the footpath, East Ruston FP1, across South Fen had to be removed from the scheme because of the large amount of material required to raise the footpath. This was deemed by the Environment Agency to remove flood storage capacity from the floodplain. The line of the footpath was comparatively high and dry and significant wetting-up of this route was not anticipated. The Project Management Board would review this route and the other elements of the project every six months, as part of the condition of planning approval.

The upgrading of the lower-lying footpath to the south, East Ruston FP2, where it crossed diagonally a small grass marsh, had been retained in the scheme. This would be raised by the addition of 50cm of soil won from re-profiling of nearby ditches, laid over a weight-bearing membrane. A grass surface would be re-established by replacement of the stripped turf with seeding where required. For health and safety reasons while the work was in progress, and to assist re-establishment of the turf surface, a temporary footpath closure had been arranged. Because of the planning delays, a request had been made to extend this closure to 30 September 2010. A diversion with signage had been agreed with landowners.

(3) Whole Valley Approach Update

The Head of Valley Management reported that a pilot study had been set up in the Ant Valley in 2009 to test the principles of the valley approach by bringing together groups and organisations that were

based in the area to see how this type of approach would work in practice on the ground.

A series of workshops and meetings have been held to guide the development of the work, which also informed the development of measures of success for the Ant Pilot project.

Some of the work completed as part of the project included:

- A liaison group called the Ant Valley Group, which was set up in the area to help steer the development of the project.
- The development of a valley characterisation statement for the Ant Valley.
- The identification of some key areas of work in the Ant Valley that could be developed further through joint working.

The Head of Valley Management reported that she would now like to set up a working group with members of the Forum and the Ant Valley Group to look at footpath links in the Ant Valley by reviewing the current footpath network and the improvements suggested in the RoWIP, and using this information to develop a way forward for footpaths in the valley taking into account other interests such as conservation and links with moorings.

Keith Bacon, Mike Flett and Louis Baugh agreed to join the working group.

The Head of Valley Management agreed to attend a future meeting to update the Forum on the outcomes of the working group.

2/13 Any Other Business

Members questioned whether the budgeting cuts would affect the Forum. The Head of Valley Management stated that at present it was not known but that in the current climate cuts were expected in the future.

The Forum questioned whether it would be possible to have presentations in advance of future meetings or if meetings could start at 1.30 p.m., although it was noted that the 2.00 pm start time for meetings during 2010 had already been advertised via the EDP and on the Broads Authority's website.

2/14 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 16 June 2010 at 2.00 pm at Dragonfly House, 2 Gilders Way, Norwich.

The meeting concluded at 5.00 p.m.

Chairman