

Broads Authority

Broads Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2010

Present

Dr Keith Bacon (Chairman)

Mr Chris Yardley	Mr Ray Walpole
Mr Gary Simons	Ms Liz Brooks
Mr George Saunders	Mr Tony Howes
Mr Graham Downing	Mrs Hattie Llewelyn-Davies
Mr Louis Baugh	Mr Nick Larkin
Mr Mike Flett	Mr Patrick Hacon

In Attendance

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

Also in Attendance

Mr Zahid Hamid - Mosaic
Ms Sarah Abercrombie - Norfolk County Council

4/1 Apologies for Absence and Chairman's Announcements

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Stephen Read, Mr Charles Swan, Ms Cynthia Wake, Mr Peter Medhurst, Mr Robin Buxton, Mrs Jo Lester and Mr Alan Duce.

Keith Bacon thanked Louis Baugh for arranging the morning's site visit to his farm to look at aspects of public rights of way and permissive routes, noting that during the visit members also met the boatyard owner at Ludham Bridge. He also informed the Forum that wheel clamping was in operation at Dragonfly House for cars illegally parked on the premises, and that it was therefore advisable for members to park elsewhere when attending meetings.

4/2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4/3 Points of Information Arising from the Minutes

(1) Minute 3/4: The St Benet's Abbey Project

Keith Bacon reported that Anne Mason had written to the Environment Agency regarding access to St Benet's Abbey from Ludham Bridge. As the Forum considered this to be a vital link between the two sites, members suggested that a meeting of interested parties, including Ludham and Horning Parish Councils, the Water Management Alliance, the St Benet's Abbey Project, the Forum, the Head Countryside Ranger and the Broads Projects Co-ordinator, be arranged. It was noted that other issues, such as flooding and the remodelling of the boatyard, would need to be addressed. It was also noted that changes to the configuration of the flood bank at the boatyard would be subject to a planning application.

Louis Baugh stated that at present the watercourse ran along the boatyard flood bank. The Water Management Alliance would shortly be replacing the current drainage pump with two smaller pumps, which would be sited further away from both the boatyard and the road. The proposal would then be to establish a footpath out of the way of the boatyard.

The Forum agreed that this footpath would need to be a public right of way rather than a permissive path, and noted that it would be feasible to align the path along the top of the culvert, as this had been achieved in a number of cases in the past.

The Forum understood that legally it was easier to create a new public right of way rather than establish an old route that would need to be diverted. However, they felt that the potential for two public enquiries, if user evidence was used to establish a right of way, could apply pressure for two route options.

The Broads Projects Co-ordinator tabled a briefing note regarding the procedure for establishing public rights of way, confirming that creating footpaths by agreement was the preferred option. The Head Countryside Ranger therefore agreed to discuss this further with the relevant people.

(2) Minute 3/7: Broads Authority Website

Tony Howes reported that the Broads Tourism Forum was actively collaborating with the Broads Authority regarding its tourism website and would be meeting on Friday 17 September to collate further contributions for it.

The Head Countryside Ranger reported that a 'Broads Countryside Access Update' would be added to the tourism website shortly.

(3) **Minute 3/8: Walking and Cycling Hubs**

Ray Walpole suggested that Ludham Bridge at Johnson Street would make an excellent hub, as it was in a great location and had a café, toilets and parking facilities. It was also on a bus route as well as being part of the A1062 Rural Route. The Forum recommended that this idea be explored further by the Ant Valley Group. The Head of Valley Management agreed to take this proposal forward.

(4) **Minute 3/13: Rights of Way and Access Improvement Plan Update and Review**

The Head Countryside Ranger reported that the proposed route for the Harnser's Way had been discussed with Norfolk County Council. However, due to the current financial climate Norfolk County Council was unwilling to further the project at present.

The Forum was disappointed with this result, stating that Norfolk County Council had overlooked a good opportunity for partnership working, especially with parish councils.

The Head Countryside Ranger agreed to raise the Harnser's Way again at his next meeting with Norfolk County Council, as this would follow their financial review and might receive a more positive response.

4/4 Mosaic: Involving Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

The Mosaic Project Officer tabled a brief report and explained that the Mosaic Project, a national three year initiative led by the Campaign for National Parks, aimed to build sustainable links between black and minority ethnic communities, the national park authorities in England and the Youth Hostel Association.

A key feature of the project was to improve the accessibility of national parks to people from black and minority ethnic communities, primarily from urban areas.

Community champions from Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Norwich were currently being introduced to the Broads and key staff to strengthen their links with the Broads Authority. These links were being made with families in mind. It was hoped in the future to introduce these champions to the Forum, to enable links to be made with members.

At present interested groups should contact the Mosaic Project Officer or the Head Countryside Ranger. However, it is hoped that by 2012 there would be strong enough links between champions, local people and staff to enable better communication between all parties. Community champions might also be keen to play a role in the Forum.

4/5 Scoping Exercise for Potential BESL Enhancements and Rights of Way Improvement Plan Update

The Head Countryside Ranger reported that BESL would be entering the maintenance stage of the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project from 2014/15 onwards. As part of these works BESL had invited the Forum to suggest areas in which there could be further access enhancements. This was an important reason for the scoping exercise.

The Head Countryside Ranger also reported that as the Rights of Way Improvement Plan was now in its third year and 25 actions were currently being progressed and seven had already been completed, it was an opportune moment to review the Action Plan.

The Forum was then asked to consider areas around the location of flood banks that could be enhanced. Members' suggestions would then be collated by the Head Countryside Ranger, who would report back on the outcomes of the exercise at the next meeting.

4/6 National and Regional Local Access Forum Issues

(1) Regional Representative Update

The Head Countryside Ranger reported that the Access and Recreation Lead Adviser for Natural England had confirmed that Debbie Hougie, from Hertfordshire Local Access Forum, was currently attending England Access Forum (EAF) meetings until a second representative from the East of England was either appointed or elected. Liddy Lawrence, also from Hertfordshire Local Access Forum, was the other East of England representative.

The Head Countryside Ranger requested that, as Peter Medhurst was no longer able to stand as a nominee, members interested in being nominated contact either him or the Forum's secretary.

Hattie Llewelyn-Davies agreed to contact Liddy Lawrence to find out her views on the EAF and report back to the Forum at the next meeting.

(2) Agri-Environmental Scheme Petition

Louis Baugh declared an interest in agri-environmental schemes (see Appendix 1 for details).

The Forum considered a report by the Broads Local Access Forum member representing walking, which sought to share his ideas and encourage members to support the production of a petition in support of agri-environmental schemes.

Ray Walpole stated that both the Norfolk Coalition of MPs and the Chairman of the EAF had been receptive to the Norfolk Local Access Forum's petition, and urged the Forum to produce and forward a similar petition to the MPs with constituencies in the Broads area.

Louis Baugh explained that Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) payments had a tiered structure with specific targets, so public access via permissive paths/routes would need to be of community benefit. It was not enough for a landowner to use the premise of a permissive path/route in order to receive a HLS payment. Therefore a permissive path/route identified in an improvement plan would be given increased credence.

RESOLVED

that members pursue the proposal raised in the report, but amend the wording in the petition to read:

'...the Stewardship Scheme has opened up many new public footpaths and rides and encouraged parishes...'

4/7 Review of England Access Forum

The Head Countryside Ranger discussed with members the issues raised in the consultation letter the Forum had received from the Chairman of the EAF. Members felt that the EAF had little or no direct impact on the Forum so it was difficult to respond to the consultation. The Forum agreed that the EAF had a strategic role, and in the current financial climate an effective body to put the priority on access to the government was important, otherwise it would be in a very vulnerable position and could result in the disbandment of the Local Access Forums. Ray Walpole confirmed that the agri-environmental scheme petition had also conveyed the importance of access to MPs, which they had previously overlooked.

The Head Countryside Ranger requested that, should members have any further comments regarding the EAF consultation, they should forward them to the Forum's secretary, to enable him to compile a response.

4/8 Annual Report of the Local Access Forum

The Forum considered the draft Annual Report which would be presented to the Broads Authority at its meeting later in September. The report set out the key matters considered by the Broads Local Access Forum during the last year relating to the development and improvement of public access to land and water for open-air recreation and enjoyment. The report also contained other information suggested in the government's recent guidance.

The Forum discussed the Report and requested that the word 'costal' in point 2.3 be amended to coastal and the word 'walking' be changed to mobility in point 2.4.

The Forum noted that members' profiles were in order of space, and that photographs of the new members would be added to their profiles.

The Head Countryside Ranger tabled a suggested modification to the vision statement. However, following a brief discussion the Forum agreed to keep the original wording.

The Head Countryside Ranger explained that, to keep costs to a minimum, an electronic copy of the Report would be emailed to Natural England, as stated in the government regulations. The Report was also available in an electronic format on the Broads Authority's website. Hard copies would only be printed as required, and these would be produced in-house. The introductory leaflet produced last year, which was also used to promote the work of the Broads Forum, was again available in an electronic format on the website, with hard copies printed, when required, in-house.

4/9 'Enjoy the Broads Countryside' Awards

The Forum considered a report by the Local Access Forum member representing walking, which sought to share his ideas and encourage members to support the development of the 'Enjoy the Broads Countryside' awards.

Tony Howes suggested that the Broads Tourism Forum might be interested in sponsoring the awards, as it would provide the general public with a greater understanding of the work of the Forum as well as rewarding small organisations, companies and communities. It would also mean that the Forum would not need to undertake any of the administration associated with the awards. Mr Howes therefore agreed to raise the idea at the next Broads Tourism Forum committee meeting of executives.

The Forum felt that the awards would need to be access related and connected with the Forum's work.

Ray Walpole reported that the Norfolk Association of Local Councils also had an awards scheme, which they administered for the Norfolk communities. Mr Walpole confirmed that he was happy to raise the idea of an 'Enjoy the Broads Countryside' awards scheme with the Association if the Forum felt it would be of benefit to do so.

4/10 Ant Valley Group Update

The Head of Valley Management tabled a briefing note informing the Forum of the outcomes of the initial Ant Valley Access Group meeting held in July 2010, which included a list of aims for the Group.

Keith Bacon explained that the fifth aim had been included to ensure that local inhabitants were not overlooked and were encouraged to find out about their area. The Forum therefore suggested that a note be inserted before the list of

aims acknowledging that access was available to tourists and local residents alike.

The Forum felt that the eighth aim, relating to the development of a long distance path, was an aspiration, especially in the current financial climate, but suggested that if one unbroken route could not be created alternative means should be considered to link the sections where footpath access was not possible, e.g. bus routes.

The Forum requested that, as accessibility for all was not always practical, a further aim to 'increase accessibility for those with mobility difficulties' be added to the list.

The Forum discussed the possibility of encouraging schools to involve pupils in their local area by developing competition styled projects, noting that Acle High School had been involved in producing publicity for Burlingham Woods, and BTEC students from Bungay High School were involved with practical conservation work including footpath maintenance.

The Access Group also agreed a set of actions relating to path connections and improvements in the Ant Valley, and the Head of Valley Management noted that progress had already been made regarding the environmental impact assessment requested by Natural England for the footpath link from How Hill to Irstead Holmes. The Head of Valley Management agreed to forward the assessment information to Keith Bacon and update the Forum on progress at a future meeting.

The Forum felt that in this financial climate it was important to source funding for priority hotspots such as St Benet's Abbey.

The Forum suggested a number of areas of high ground that could be utilised to create view points for the whole valley. Therefore the Head Countryside Ranger agreed to add Upper Street (Horning) and Martham, as possible viewing points, to the outcomes of the scoping exercise (Item 6).

4/11 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 (BFAP) that were currently being worked on by Broads Authority and BESL officers.

The creation agreement for a public right of way along the section of bank between Horsefen Mill and Horsefen Bank, Ludham was currently with solicitors.

It was hoped that by next autumn the creation agreement for a public right of way along the realigned flood wall at Geldeston Marshes (part of Compartment 25a) would be in place.

Following BESL's recent Hickling Wetland Project consultation (Compartment 6, Phase 2 and Compartment 6A, Phase 2) and the concerns raised by a number of organisation as to the future of the section of the Weavers Way long distance footpath that ran along the existing flood wall, a request had been made to dedicate a new right of way along the crest of the new flood bank, which the Broads Authority would like BESL to commence immediately. BESL would undertake works to level and widen the surface of the section of Weavers Way that ran along the existing flood wall and maintain it for five years after the creation of the new flood bank. The maintenance of this footpath would then become the responsibility of the highways agency.

South Walsham Parish Council had recently been consulted regarding the Broads Authority's view that if they were to restore the slipway it should be opened up to wider public use. Once their response had been received and considered it would be discussed at both the Navigation Committee and Broads Authority.

4/12 Broads Forum Update

Keith Bacon reported that the items discussed by the Broads Forum on 22 July included a report on the financial implications for National Parks and the appointment of four parish councillors, which was due to take place shortly, and the Draft Broads Plan and the importance of including parish staithes and wakeboarding.

At the next meeting Forum members would be discussing the access issues surrounding St Benet's Abbey.

Forum members also had a closed door meeting to discuss a way forward for future agendas and minute taking. The outcomes of this discussion were forwarded to the Authority's Chief Executive and the Forum's secretary to see if it would be possible to make the Forum more effective.

4/13 Any Other Business

The Forum questioned how the government's comprehensive spending review would affect the Broads Authority. Members requested that Keith Bacon write to the Authority's Chief Executive informing him that the Forum regarded access and the Countryside Section as a vital part of the Authority's activities. Members also requested that this issue be included as an item for the Forum's meeting in December.

4/14 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 8 December 2010 at 2.00 p.m.

The meeting concluded at 4.50 p.m.

Chairman

