

Your Countryside

Year 2: April 2015 Highlight Report

Connecting Spaces

New ROW Survey system

Following on-site volunteer training at the start of the year, a number of P3 groups have resurveyed their network using bespoke forms. Their results have been added to our Network Management System (CAMS) database and job groups drawn up for our completion in 15/16.

Maintenance Policy

Working closely with the Joint local Access Forum (JLAF), this policy pulls together and revises a number of pieces of existing policy into one document. It is close to final sign off which is expected over the next couple of months.

Ease of Use – National Benchmark Indicator

2014's whole year figure of 82.2% is made up of 81.1% in May and 83.0% in September. This is down on last year's (2013) 88% figure but still very high when compared to authorities of similar size and make up. Missing roadside signposts were the main reason for failures and will be addressed in 15/16 Capital works programme.



Consolidation of the Definitive Map and Statement

Completed in late 2014, a single consolidated document for Central Bedfordshire has been produced, rather than the three documents for the former urban district councils. The next consolidation is dependent on the number of future legal event modification orders that we generate but is likely to start early 2016.

Biggleswade Excluded Area [No Definitive Map]

Work has concentrated on the claimed public right of way at the site of the former Crown - Public House following an application to develop the land. This case has involved historical research as well as interviewing of residents with evidence of use. A report to Committee is expected summer 2015.

Legal Orders

- 16 Public Path Orders [PPOs] were processed through to confirmation of which one was under the Town and Country Planning Act [in conjunction with planning development]
- 1 Definitive Map Modification Order [DMMO] was processed through to confirmation



East Coast Mainline and East-West Rail Projects

Both schemes are working through public consultations. The East Coast Mainline [ECML] project is at its second round with revisions made following comments and suggestions from relevant bodies and local residents. The East-West Rail scheme is likely to prioritise the crossings to be closed rather than all locations on the ECML.



Breathing Spaces

Countryside Site Surveys

5 site user surveys were undertaken at Aspley Woods, Dunstable Downs, Oak Wood, Sundon Hills Country Park and Totternhoe Knolls. At 3 of the sites Aspley Woods, Dunstable Downs and Sundon Hills Country Park user satisfaction was over 90% with Dunstable Downs recording the highest rating at 95.7%. The other 2 sites had recordings in the high 80's. Comparing performance with previous surveys (3 years ago) 2 sites, Aspley Woods and Dunstable Downs showed an increase in user satisfaction and the other 3 a decline. At Sundon Hills Country Park the decline was very small. However, at the 2 smaller sites although the decline was more noticeable satisfaction may have been affected by one off activities, e.g. illegal motor cycle access at Totternhoe Knolls.

Dogs in the Countryside – Flagship Project



Support has been given to Council's Community Safety Team in developing and producing Dog Control Orders, particularly with consultation with partners and countryside groups. The proposed orders received good support with the orders covering Dog Fouling, Dogs on a lead by direction, Dogs on a lead (selected areas) and Dog exclusions (selected areas). Following consultation the orders were made on the 18th October 2014. CAS has provided training for 43 CBC and partner organisation staff (Greensand Trust, National Trust, Forest of Marston Vale and RSPB, as well as Dunstable Town Council and Leighton-Linslade Town Council) to enforce the orders affecting the countryside. Signage has been purchased and is currently being erected. All rights of way finger posts and countryside site entrances will be signed by June 2015, by CAS staff with the help of volunteers. Community Safety are arranging signage in town and village areas.

6 targeted spraying campaigns have taken place this year with partners, friends groups and volunteers. All have been successful at raising awareness amongst dog owners about the importance of cleaning up after pets in a public space. These campaigns have reduced fouling by up to 80%. The latest campaign at Flitwick Wood saw a reduction in weekly offences from 66 to 19. Trials repeated on the same sites a year later have shown that the effects are long lasting.



Working with partners (Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Greensand Trust) we are developing consistent messages for dog walkers for all sites across CBC and trialling different ways of getting these across. This will be taken forward in tandem with the new national guidance being developed by Natural England. We have been engaging with dog owners promoting responsible dog walking at targeted events such as the Linslade Wood fun dog day and the Rushmere Summer Fayre dog show.

There is also agreement to appoint a jointly funded part time Countryside Dog Warden to promote responsible dog walking and educate owners about specific site needs.

Henlow Common and Langford Meadows Local Nature Reserve

This site has been extended following the gift of an additional parcel of land from a neighbour. The new area, known as Seal Bank, (named after the benefactor) has been improved, in partnership with Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC), following local consultations. Improvements include cutting of an additional path allowing more of the site to be enjoyed, tree work and the addition of new benches and bird and bat boxes. This work has been funded through section 106 funds secured by BRCC for improvements in the Ivel Valley. In addition, new trees have been donated by Langford Parish Council and local residents.

Elsewhere on the site, management work including hard rush management and thistle cutting has taken place to maintain species diversity and as a requirement of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme. Works to improve access have also taken place – the re-stoning of gateways and improvements to causeways both allow better access through the wet winter months.

Baulk Wood

This site grows ever more popular. Improvement works have taken place to keep on top of visitor pressure. Paths were widened over the winter and a series of willows pollarded to allow more light and air in to improve a very muddy section of path.

Another successful 'Run Wild' Natural Play event took place in the summer with over 100 local children attending.

Volunteers meet monthly to carry out maintenance tasks and woodland work such as coppicing and bramble bashing. Other community events include hedge planting with Clifton Pre School, orienteering with Henlow Scouts and an Easter Egg Hunt organised by 2 Samuel Whitbread Academy students, who raised over £200 for their Camps International expedition to Ecuador.



Etonbury Wood

Etonbury has had a year of discovery where we have observed the ground flora and fauna, to find out what is there and where; this has informed plans for future management and improvements to the site.

This has led to the placement of two new bridges crossing Pix Brook. Both bridges, along with the existing culvert, increase connectivity: One will be linked to by a Bridleway which will be put



in place this coming year. The other allows visitors to circulate around the site more easily and links to a re-opened permissive route. Also, BRCC has worked with local volunteers to widen some existing rides.

New notice boards and a litter bin have been installed for better communication and to increase the facilities as more people visit the site in the future.

Jubilee Wood

Work continues to install infrastructure to help visitors enjoy the site and allow future grazing of the open grassland area. Kissing gates, maintenance vehicle gates, benches and notice boards have been included in this. The site has been hedged with native hedgerow, ditch and french drains put in place to keep the rides dry all year round and a jamming hedge, funded by Green Infrastructure money, planted by BRCC's Ivel Valley Conservation Volunteers. Rides have been mown and the site is in constant use by walkers, exercising themselves and their dogs, many of which comment on the wildlife that is already being seen at the site. The site has been awarded the CPRE mark award for biodiversity. The woodland is establishing well, but there have been a few losses. Work to replace losses and re-stand guards will be continuous as the trees grow over the coming years.

Langford Riverside

This site has no vehicular access and so any management is very difficult. In the autumn we were able to negotiate some temporary access with a neighbouring landowner and we took advantage to undertake some major tree safety work and remove an old shed. This was again funded by Section 106 funds secured by BRCC to improve the Ivel Valley. Negotiations have been taking place with several landowners to try and secure access for maintenance and also to allow for the future construction of the bridge across the River Ivel associated with the Tarmac gravel workings on the other side of the river.

Flitton Moor

We have removed the old barn at Flitton Moor, which was aged and had become unsafe, and have applied for planning consent to replace it with a similar structure. This will provide much needed shelter for volunteers and visitors to the site alike. Subject to planning approval, The Friends Group have secured funding for a new structure from Biffa Awards and hope the new barn will take shape in the summer. It is hoped to also provide boards to inform visitors about the site, the Flit Valley and local history.

Site Welcome Boards

We are gradually getting around the sites with a programme of providing / refreshing site information boards. These include information about the site as well as safety information. New additions this year include new boards at Walkers Green, Etonbury Wood and Jubilee Wood.

Bedfordshire Drowning Prevention Advisory Group

This is a new group which has been set up by Beds Fire and Rescue Service. We have been involved from the outset and it is hoped to develop a unified approach to water safety in the countryside across Bedfordshire. It is likely that we will host future water safety events on our sites.

Tree Safety

As part of our ongoing programme of tree safety works, preventative works have taken place at sites including Hatch Plantation, Clophill Nursery, Woodland Chase, Flitwick Wood and Saxon Gate Pocket Park.

Marston Vale Great Crested Newt Project

We have supported this SITA Trust funded project which has created 3 ponds and restored one pond at Marston Thrift and restored one pond at Glebe Meadows.



Volunteers and other events

Our Friends Groups have been doing sterling work, meeting regularly to carry out management tasks at sites including Flitton Moor, Flitwick Wood, Marston Thrift, Tiddenfoot, Studham Common, Knolls Wood and Linslade Wood. At Campton Wood we held a community evening to clean up the sculpture trail and manage the invasive Himalayan Balsam. Also at Campton Wood, the ever popular twilight story walk was well attended once again.

Houghton Hall Park

We are pleased to confirm our Heritage Lottery Fund bid was successful. Confirmation was received in January and we are looking forward to starting works as soon as possible. The main themes of development are the re-creation of the historic Kitchen Garden and Ornamental gardens and construction of a Visitors Hub. Once all the construction works are completed, we will then be implementing an activities events programme.



Houghton Hall Car Park

Re-development construction works were completed in October 2014 with the extended car park now containing 82 spaces in total. The lease agreement with Whitbread was signed in December and the car park is now fully operational. All of the above spaces are available to park users after 6.00pm weekdays and all day over the weekends. The generated income will go towards the future development and maintenance of the park.

Flood Risk Alleviation (Leighton Buzzard area)

A lot of officer time has been spent on vegetation clearance, bank enhancement and bankside erosion works in Leighton Buzzard which has involved some joint working with Leighton Linslade Town Council. The works included inspecting the sites, identifying works required, writing a specification / producing maps, gaining quotes and appointing contractors to do the works and monitoring performance.

We were also heavily involved in the joint CBC and Environment Agency scheme that reduces the threat/impact of future flooding risk and also improves the open space along Riverside Walk to the rear of Carina Drive.

Totternhoe Hills

Following the adoption of the Totternhoe Hills Vision Plan (2013), The Totternhoe Project continues with a partnership of organisations working together in the area. The ongoing issue of illegal use by motorcyclists continues to challenge and, to help prevent this, a new suite of signage is going up at all access points to explain to users who can, and who can't, use the green lanes legally.

New Public Open Space – Southern Leighton Buzzard

We are currently working with colleagues from Legal, Planning and Assets regarding the adoption of a further 27 hectares of Public Open Space in Leighton Buzzard at Grovebury Quarry / Southern Meadows. Once the legal transfer has been completed, we will be working on installing interpretation panels, walking routes, tree / hedge planting and circular walking routes

Commons and Village Greens on web

Both Commons and Village Greens are now listed on bespoke web pages with an intention to improve by attaching digitised maps over the short to medium term. Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) Mobile



The Remote Database Access Application has gone live with hand devices used by Site and ROW staff for on-site surveying of trees and path furniture. This data is then used to electronically update the main CAMS database.



(Baulk Wood – Run Wild 2014)



Local Spaces

CPRE Awards

At the bi-annual CPRE Bedfordshire Living Countryside Awards, the Countryside Access Team received three awards for projects in which the team have been involved:

- Jubilee Wood, Biggleswade - a joint project with BRCC which included planting 8000 trees with local people as part of the Biggleswade Green Wheel. (Gold Award).
- The Forager's Way – a project at Tiddenfoot Waterside Park with the 'Friends' group involving restoring and laying an ancient hedgerow rich in fruit trees and the planting of new fruit trees to encourage people to collect fruit. (Silver Award).
- New Footpath at Poppy Hill Lake, Henlow – the creation of new rights of way around fishing lakes and encouraging access into the wider countryside. (Silver Award).
- Haynes Allotments – the creation of a new allotment for the village with 22 plots and fruit trees. (Commended).

Keep Britain Tidy Awards

We nominated John Buxton, one of our keenest and long-term volunteers for the newly-announced 'Volunteer of the Year' national award organised by Keep Britain Tidy. To our great delight, and most deservedly, John was awarded the top place of **national 'Volunteer of the Year'**. He was also a runner-up in the overall 'Jubilee Awards 2015'.



P3/Friends

P3 continues to support CBC through local volunteers who work with us to help us to improve our sites, green spaces and Rights of Way. Volunteers are encouraged and supported through a wide programme of walks, talks, events, workshops, an annual get-together and social events. This year a new training programme has been implemented which is 'upskilling' volunteers in new areas of training and skills which will help us to manage our sites even more efficiently. There are currently 39 P3 and 16 Friends groups, with over 650 volunteers, supporting the work of the Countryside Access Team. Some groups have also held events to help attract more people to visit our sites and activities such as story telling and night time walks have proved very popular.

Central Bedfordshire and Luton Joint Local Access Forum

Our ongoing partnership with Luton Borough Council met four times and held several sub group meetings during 2014-15. Meetings are well attended and JLAF members are keen to improve access opportunities within Central Bedfordshire and Luton. Agreement has been reached with Luton to extend the partnership for a further three years from 2015-16 to 2017-18 inclusive.



Southern Sites volunteers

This partnership project between land organisations in the northern Chilterns is bringing together volunteers and site managers to get land well managed and looked after. There is now a website: <http://northchilternsvolunteering.com/> and this is helping to bring people together to look after our sites, green spaces and Rights of Way in this area. We are also working closely with the Chiltern Society (CS) to establish a North Chilterns Local Volunteer Group which will tap into CS volunteers and P3 and will bring improvements to RoW and green spaces thus further benefitting CBC.

Bedfordshire Walking Festival

Officers ran 6 walks of varying lengths and interests across the authority area with numbers attending well up on previous years. Plans are advanced for this year's festival that runs between 5th and 13th September 2015.



Service Apprentice

Our Apprentice, James Coggins, has been in post for over 18 months. James is nearing completion of his Level 2 diploma in Environmental Conservation through Bedford College and is looking to then begin a Level 3 course in the same field, concentrating on modules working with and managing volunteers.

Healthy Spaces

Cycling Development

All 12 circular cycle routes are now available to download via CBC's website and are receiving much recognition amongst local cyclists.

The 38 mile Greensand Cycle Ride now has downloadable PDFs available from the CBC website and has also received praise for its mix of on and off road routes.

The 'Cycle Central' project continues to be developed and will become an over-arching flagship for all cycling-related activities in Central Bedfordshire. The project will promote the benefits of cycling to existing and new users and will raise the profile of cycling within the area to those who visit for leisure, health and recreation.

Health Benefits within the Natural Environment

Following a successful funding bid to Natural England's, Innovation and Partnerships Programme work has commenced with the 'Centre for Sustainable Health Care' to identify the key benefits that justify a closer working partnership between GP's and outdoor access providers. This project has drawn the 'Bedfordshire and Luton Joint Local Access Forum' and The 'Bedfordshire Local Nature Partnership' closer together and provided opportunities for interworking with Public Health, Physical Activity and the Clinical Commissioning Group.



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Growing Spaces

Green Infrastructure S106 - funding wins

In the 2015 Green Infrastructure s106 bid round, a number of schemes were submitted by the council and its delivery partners. Successful projects included:

- **Tiddenfoot Waterside Park (£30,000)**
 - Creation of a nesting habitat for Sand Martins with a bird hide and tree planting to increase flight paths and create an additional feeding habitat
- **Etonbury Green Wheel (£93,800)**
 - Upgrade surface of 2.5km of green wheel route, in addition to creating approx. 650m of new PRow / GW route
 - Restore two historic orchards (total 160+ trees) and two ponds
 - Plant over 2.3km hedge, plus trees, bulbs and wildflowers at multiple sites around the GW
 - Installation of two information boards and six benches
- **Biggleswade Green Wheel (£49,000)**
 - Enhancements to the entrance to Biggleswade Common (Bedfordshire's largest Common and an important accessible green space in its own right).
 - Creation of the final link to enable cycling around the whole GW.
 - Biodiversity and landscape enhancements at a number of key sites, including Biggleswade Common, Jubilee Wood and Saxon Drive Linear Woods.
 - Heritage arts trail (extension).
- **Sandy Green Wheel (£54,875)**
 - New surfaced sections of the Green Wheel; including 600m of brand new route
 - Landscape enhancement and habitat creation / care including tree & orchard planting, hedge laying and wetland feature creation
 - Greenspace provision and heritage celebration through planting an orchard.
 - Enhanced access to the river for viewing wildlife and disabled angling

Delivery of these projects will take place during 2015-2017.

Biggleswade Green Wheel



The new 1.9km path for walkers and cyclists which enables walkers and cyclists to travel safely from Biggleswade to Old Warden and south to Jordans Mill without having to cross the A1 at grade was completed in 2014-15. This was partly funded by Natural England's Paths for Communities fund (£26,700) and has proved very popular with users.

New Biggleswade Green Wheel (BGW) signage and interpretation has been installed around the BGW (funded by GI Planning obligations funding awarded to BRCC our partner organisation in this project). This will encourage and enable more users to explore the BGW.

The BGW was officially launched on 22nd March 2015. The event was very successful with over 250 people participating in guided walks, the guided cycle ride or completing sections of the BGW by themselves. A large number of volunteers helped to make the day such a success



including members of Biggleswade Ivel Rotary Club, the Friends of BGW and Edward Peake Middle School PTA. The BGW leaflet was launched at the event and is proving very popular. It is available to download at [Biggleswade Green Wheel leaflet](#).



Greenspace Master Planning and Accessible Landscape Planning – Flagship Project

In addition to delivery work on Biggleswade Green Wheel:

- Sandy Green Wheel – Adopted
- Etonbury Green Wheel (Arlesey / Stotfold and Fairfield) – In progress expected completion October 2015
- Blue Lagoon, Arlesey – Working with the lakes new tenant to develop this site, into a new country park in the east of Central Bedfordshire. This site has an extremely difficult history and is a challenging proposition that all in the area are keen to resolve.
- Flitwick Green Wheel – In Progress, expected completion late 2015
- Flitwick Country Park – Supporting Flitwick Town Council in the development of their Country Park. Initial consultation on the park was delivered in April 2015, this will continue over the summer.
- Marston Vale Accessible Landscape (Brogbrough / Lidlington / Brogbrough Landfill / Marston Moretaine) – In initial development.





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