

Central Bedfordshire Council

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Central
Bedfordshire

Your Countryside

Outdoor Access Improvement Plan

Highlight Report

Sept 2013



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Following adoption of the 'Outdoor Access Improvement Plan' by Central Bedfordshire Council's, Executive Committee on the 18th March 2013, a Business Plan has now been developed, which will form the basis of regular progress reporting to the Local Access Forum and Executive member responsible for this area of work. In 2013 it has been agreed that this will be November and then in April 2014 along with a refresh of the coming years Business Plan. In future years it is intended to be September and March.

To support this, regular highlight reports will be published to inform the Local Access Forum of projects and works which are moving forward as the year progresses.

Flagship Projects

Houghton Hall Park

The Countryside Access Stage 1 (Development) bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (Parks for People Programme) was successful. We have been awarded £215,100 to develop detailed proposals for restoration and improvement. An initial start up meeting with HLF has been held and we are awaiting official 'permission to start'.

All preparation for recruiting a project manager and procuring a range of professional consultancy services has been completed. The post and the contracts will be advertised once the 'permission to start' letter is received.

An inaugural project board meeting has been held. Houghton Regis Town Council is in the process of finalising Councillor representation. Community representatives are also being sought.

The proposed car park extension (financed through CBC Capital Programme) is being managed outside the scope of the HLF project. The tender process has been completed and approval from CBC Procurement Team is being sought to authorise Countryside Access to raise the order for the works. Work is scheduled to be completed within the timescales outlined in the Finance Business Case.

Dogs in the Countryside

Project brief and methodology is progressing well with a number of pilot studies and research being undertaken:

1. Questionnaires to gauge current knowledge of dog owners - attended 3 events, 80 returns to date
2. Anti - fouling spraying campaign - 2 trials with volunteers with very positive results and interest from local PC
3. Development of Countryside Dog Code and 'Codo' the Countryside Dog for marketing materials
4. Countryside Dog Code Training Trial at Baulk Wood - 3 sessions, 26 people, 15 dogs with very positive feed back
5. Forthcoming Countryside Dog Code Training Guided Walks at Rushmere - potentially 30 dogs and their families.



Bridleway Connectivity Project

We are in the process of finalising the project brief and business case but have yet to establish performance measures to review the success of the project. We are in

discussions with ExeGisIS (GIS specialists) to produce an up-to-date connectivity map which will establish the new projects baseline

Master Planning

Biggleswade Green Wheel Strategy – is now adopted by Central Bedfordshire and will be put to Biggleswade Town Council in the coming months. We have been awarded £26,500 from Natural England through the national 'Paths for Communities' (P4C) scheme, this funding will go towards the creation of the new Shuttleworth / Jordan's Mill cycle link.

Sundon and Streatley Greenspace Vision Plan – went through draft plan with Chilterns Planning officer to gain support, Chilterns AONB are in support and will endorse the plan.

Tiddenfoot and Linslade Wood – Master Plan, went through Ouzel Valley Partnership Meeting, with their support

Sandy Green Wheel – BRCC commissioned and progressing well, additional interest has been expressed by Potton PC for future project.

Etonbury Wheel (Stotfold, Arlesey & Fairfield) – Met with all councils agreed that they will all work together, Stotfold TC have agreed to host an initial stakeholder meeting in late September.

Health and Wellbeing

We are continuing to work with colleagues developing the leisure strategy and partners in the Local Nature Partnership (LNP), to seek opportunities to promote the benefits of the Great Outdoors and physical access within it. Leisure Strategy section 4 will focus on Physical Activity and provide a strong steer on the direction that we need to take.

Connecting Spaces

Ease of Use – Performance Indicator - Spring 2012

May 2013 survey complete - 88.7 % easy to use, this is the best recorded to date was 74.5 in spring 2011 as the paths selected are truly random it is believed that this springs figure maybe an anomaly, although it is evident that when travelling through the country, that Central Beds appears to be more accessible than paths in neighbouring countys.

Main network 2.66 % surveyed – 47 paths passed / 6 failed 88.7% easy to use

Of the 6 failures:

- 2 signage damaged or missing
- 2 cropped
- 1 point vegetation obstruction
- 1 anomaly

Urban Fringe 2.65% surveyed – 19 paths passed / 13 failed 59.4 % easy to use

In contrast this is the worse figure achieved with 73.9% in spring 2012

Of the 13 failures:

- 6 related to surface vegetation

- 3 signage issues
- 1 anomaly (Stotfold / A507)

Poppy Hill Lakes scheme

Legal orders were made in May 2013 to extinguish a bridleway and to create an alternative bridleway and new footpath. No objections were received and so these orders will be confirmed on 6 September. Preliminary clearance work has already begun in preparation for building the new bridge abutments. Estimated completion date for the scheme is mid-late October 2013. We have not been able to secure as much external funding as hoped and the bridge has come in at about £25k more than budgeted. Cost avoidance in other areas will reduce this although there is still likely to be a small overspend of possibly £5-10k as things stand.

Maulden FP 28

The long-running saga of this contentious footpath continues. Original applications made to the former Beds County Council to have the path variously deleted, extinguished and stopped up under different Acts were all determined by Development Management Committee in February 2013.

The application to delete the footpath on the basis it should not be recorded on the Definitive Map was refused. The applicant has since appealed to the Secretary of State and the decision of whether he should direct the Council to make a Definitive Map Modification Order to delete the footpath is currently awaited in September or early October.

The application to extinguish the footpath on the basis it is unneeded was made in May and has received objections. The Council's reasons for making the order will be submitted to the Secretary of State in mid-September. A public inquiry is envisaged next spring/summer.

The application to stop up the footpath by Magistrates' Court order on the basis that it is unnecessary was approved and a preliminary court hearing held in July set a 15th January 2014 date for a case management hearing to establish a further date for the case to be eventually heard. There is significant local and national opposition to the stopping up of the footpath.

Barton-le-Clay FP 9

An increasingly acrimonious case where we are trying to establish the legal width and position of a short length of footpath. The issues are confused by the presence of a wider private easement which has been blocked by a gate partially on the footpath. Any order is likely to be opposed by at least one of the landowners who border the footpath.

Clophill FP A4

An application to extinguish a section of footpath that only connected to a Defra stewardship permissive path was approved by the Development Management Committee in July despite massive local support for its retention and opening up. An extinguishment order was made in early August and has been objected to. CBC may have to defend its decision at Court in responding to a received S.130A Notice requiring the footpath to be opened up; and then defend the making of the order at a public inquiry next spring/summer.

Pulloxhill FP 20

Diversion and creation of parts of FP 20 and linking spur to FP 3. Supported by all parties so far.

Breathing Spaces

Commons and Village Greens

In June 2013 we produced a leaflet on Common Land, Town or Village Greens and Open Access Land, which provides information on these sites and the roles of Central Bedfordshire Council, Landowners and the wider public.

We are supporting Sandy Town Council, on Beeston Green – seeking to improve management of access to properties and management of the Green, looking at developing a community orchard on adjacent land.

This is a highly changeable area of work at the moment with a number of changes in legislation occurring:

- Under Section 15 of the Commons Act 2006 anyone can apply to register land as a town or village green where: "a significant number of the inhabitants of any locality, or of any neighbourhood within a locality, have indulged as of right in lawful sports and pastimes on the land for a period of at least 20 years".
- From 1st October 2013 the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 makes further changes to the law on registering town and village greens under the 2006 Act, with the introduction of landowner statements. These will bring to an end any period of recreational use 'as of right' over land, Therefore, the effect of depositing a landowner statement will be to interrupt any such period of use of the land shown in the map and described in the statement.
- In addition the changes introduced the registers in which the landowner statements are to be recorded. The 2013 Act will also amend the form and procedure in England for depositing highway statements and declarations under section 31(6) of the Highways Act 1980 in order to align it with landowner statements.
- Following previous amendments to legislation, there was a flush of 'Village Green' applications made, in an attempt to block developments. The Government has addressed this in the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013, which will insert alterations into the 2006 Commons Act.

Run Wild at Baulk Wood

The annual natural play event was well attended with over 100 participants enjoying a fun afternoon. Activities included den building in the wood, a play trail around the meadow, scavenger hunt and an arty area. There were also story telling sessions with tales about the wildlife of the wood and a very loud duck race to finish off the event - good fun was had by all!

Orienteering Course at Centenary Wood

A permanent orienteering course has been set up at Centenary Wood, with posts and standard markers. The map is available on line for all users. A local orienteerer has volunteered to contact local schools to introduce them to the activity and the course. Similar courses are planned at Flitwick Wood and Linslade Wood.

Species Surveys

This summer we have started a programme of species surveys on our SSSI's and CWS's. This information is vital to monitor the condition of the site and to inform management plans. Sites included this year are Kings Wood and Glebe Meadows, Blunham Railway, Henlow Common and Langford Meadows. We have also undertaken surveys at sites which we feel could make CWS status including Baulk Wood, Saxon Gate Pocket Park and Biggleswade Linear Wood.

Local Spaces

P3

Currently 39 active groups, new group developing in Eggington (mainly due to concerns over potential housing growth from eastern Leighton Buzzard development). Working towards a 'P3 Day' in autumn/early winter 2013 on the theme of 'Surveying' – this will cover the launch of a new parish-by-parish RoW survey and will also look to encourage parish-based biodiversity and other surveys. A half day workshop to be run in-house on current situation of tree diseases (*Chalara*, Sudden Oak Death (SOD) etc) and bio-security/reporting measures available – this will be autumn 2013.

'Friends' groups

3 CBC-owned sites have recently been awarded 'Green Flag Community Award' (GFCA) for site management; all these sites are managed jointly by CBC, a Friends group and a third party ie; the Greensand Trust. The sites are: Studham Common (for sixth year), Linslade Wood (for third year), Stotfold Mill Meadows (for second year). The GFCA is a national award, run by 'Keep Britain Tidy', which recognises and awards the best parks and green spaces across the country.



FOSC Green Flag Award celebration

We have continued to support our Friends Groups with site development, practical works and events. A relatively new group - Centenary Wood Action Group are going from strength to strength. We have supported several practical tasks to remove scrub from the meadow area and to clear ragwort. We have also worked closely with the group to improve facilities such as benches and picnic tables, agreeing what is required and where. These items will be purchased from Section 106 funds allocated to the site.

At Flitwick Wood the Friends group have carried out weekly litter picks and are planning winter tasks such as coppicing, which we will support. The group are invaluable for keeping an eye on the site and reporting any problems.

The Friends Group at Flitton Moor have continued to maintain the site to a very high standard. They have held their annual BBQ (we provided the chef!) and hosted a fun run. We are also supporting them to restore the barn on site.

Event attendance

This year the Countryside Access team have attended the following events.

- Young Farmers – 18th May
- Canal Festival – 27th July
- Eid Festival – 11th Aug
- Rushmere Summer Fair – 18th Aug
- Chairman's Broom Quarry Stroll – 1st Sept
- Woodworks Event, 7th and 8th Sept

We are also supporting the Ramblers Walking Festival, as various officers will be leading a variety of walks.

Due to the diversity in audience attending the events, we have had an opportunity to explain our role as a countryside team to a wide cross section of the public and have even received praise on Facebook for the positive and friendly approach of members of the team at the events.

Booklets have been prepared for each of the events to include specific information pertaining to the particular events. We have also provided displays and activities for children (e.g. a giant jigsaw and the ever popular 'whirly mills') which have encouraged interaction with the public.

Below is an example of a booklet that we produced:

News and events in the Bedfordshire Countryside
The Countryside Access Team Facebook Page
<http://www.facebook.com/CBCountryside>

An online problem reporting form for rights of way issues
To report an issue on a right of way
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/offices/centralbedfordshire/Reporting_issues_on_a_right_of_way.shtml

Follow us on twitter.....
@BedsCountryside
 all that's going on in our countryside

Rights of Way, Countryside Sites, Common Land, Cycling
The Countryside Access Teams Website
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside

Attending from Countryside Access
Central Bedfordshire
 Adam Maciejewski - Definitive Map Officer
 Stuart Harrison - Senior Planning & Projects Officer
 Lyndsey Biggell - Countryside Sites Officer
 Paul Burgess - Countryside Sites Officer

Central Bedfordshire Council's
Countryside Access Team

16
 Chris Wilson

27 July 2013

Canal Festival

Road Cycling routes

8 routes are currently in development; these are mainly updates of previous, existing routes. All are circular, make use of quieter roads and are of varying lengths from 5 to 20 miles so suitable for all abilities. Routes include areas such as; Old Warden, Northill, Cople, Shefford, Ampthill and Woburn – all are being gradually launched on a rolling programme.

The Jubilee Way is a 21 mile on-road route around the villages of Shefford, Meppershall, Pirton, Shillington and Gravenhurst taking on some of the best chalk scenery in Central Beds. The final draft is with the designer and will be available on Let's Go and other websites as a downloadable PDF.

Healthy Spaces

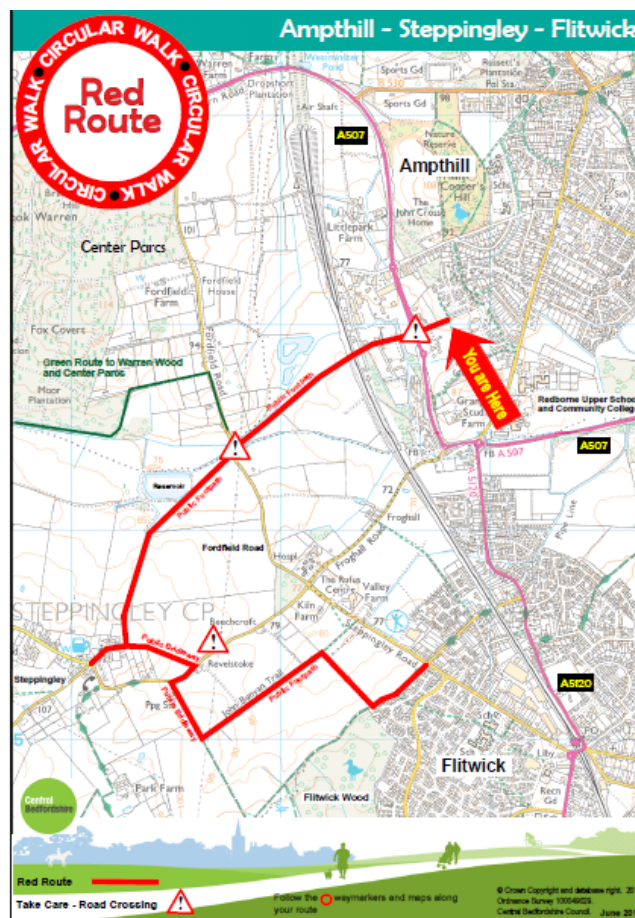
Health Walks

CBC commissions BRCC to promote and encourage Health Walks or 'Simply Walking' (aimed primarily at over 60's and those at risk of diabetes and obesity) across Central Bedfordshire. The scheme is mainly delivered by volunteers with, currently, 13 led Heath Walks at various locations across the LA area. A new walk, based on Ampthill Park, is due to be launched in September 2013. Other towns with active walks include Sandy, Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard. Also under investigation is the setting up of Nordic walking groups in Ampthill and Cranfield.

Growing Spaces

Amphill Destination Plus.

To be completed Sept 13 with all waymarking, map boards and signage up. Delays due to supply of signpost arms. Project will deliver 2 routes - west and north of Amphill (see plan below).



Major Planning.

Working closely with Environment Planning Team on most major planning applications - with North Houghton Regis taking a great deal of time. Continue to work on Planning policy - such as the Development Strategy and Design Guide and have ensured that policies are strong in relation to ROW and sites/open space. Large scale applications include E. Leighton, Arlesey, NHR, N Luton, East Biggleswade, Wixams and numerous Minerals and Waste applications.

Leisure Strategy.

Continue to work closely with Leisure and EPT on formulation of Leisure Strategy Chapter 2. Work includes adoption, management and maintenance standards.