

HAMPSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

YOUR COUNTRYSIDE NEEDS YOU

The search is on for volunteers to join a forum which provides advice to Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils and other organisations, on improving access to the countryside.

The Forum has been operating successfully for nine years and new recruits are now needed. We are particularly keen to hear from people with an interest in farming, conservation and countryside education to compliment the interests of those members who are already on the Forum.

The Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF) is the statutory Local Access Forum for Hampshire (excluding the New Forest and South Downs) Southampton and Portsmouth, required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It includes people from a cross-section of interest groups, from landowners, farmers, Councillors and rural business owners, to walkers, horse riders, cyclists and motor vehicle users - ensuring that the needs of all groups are taken into account when advice on access to the countryside is provided.

Members of the Local Access Forum will need to commit to attending four meetings per year as well as task group sessions between full meetings. They will need to have a good knowledge and understanding of at least one countryside viewpoint, but must also be able to recognise the validity of others' views. It is also expected that members actively seek the views of the interest group they represent.

A huge success for the Forum in recent years has been securing funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage project. This project is an ongoing success and currently has over 100 volunteers researching for historical evidence of rights of way which are not yet shown on our legal records but still meet current needs. The project will also engage with schools and the wider community through a travelling exhibition due to begin later this year.

At its last meeting the Forum invited District Councillors to join them for a site visit around Alice Holt Forest. This was an excellent opportunity to discuss the pressures and conflicts surrounding access at the site. The day ended with a visit to Cradle Lane, part of a new multi-user route, the Shipwrights Way, which prompted discussion of wider countryside access issues. The Forum was also able to promote the Small Grants Scheme - Countryside Access (www.hants.gov.uk/sqs) which it helped form in 2006, to provide funding to Parish Councils and landowners to make improvements to rights of way and access land. Members continue to play an active role, forming the Panel which assesses applications to the Scheme.



If you are interested in becoming a member of the Forum, more information and how to apply can be found at www.hants.gov.uk/hcaf or contact the Countryside Access Team on 01962 847165 or by email on sgs@hants.gov.uk. The closing date for applications is 9 September.