

BLACKWATER VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, FRIDAY 7th NOVEMBER 2014

Item 7:

Blackwater Valley Path: Current Issues

1 Background

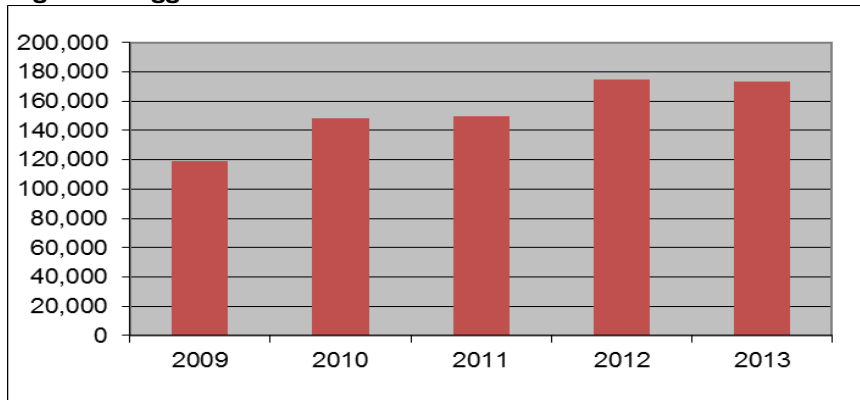
- 1.1 The creation of a long distance footpath along side the River Blackwater was one of the initial aims of the Blackwater Valley Project (as it was then known). Only in the lower (northern) sections of the Valley were there existing Rights of Way that could be used, for most of the Valley we have had to create new access.
- 1.2 There is now an continuous route down the length of the Valley from the source at Rowhill Nature Reserve to Swallowfield. Although about a quarter uses roads these are mainly quiet country lanes apart from a short section through Sandhurst town centre. It provides a 37 km (23 mile) long distance route linking the greenspaces along the Valley.
- 1.3 Lengthy sections of the route has been created when land has come into public ownership, other sections have relied on looking for and taking opportunities such as a condition of a planning application. There are still some sections missing and many that could be improved.
- 1.4 This year has seen a number of developments affecting the path some good, others not so positive. This report provides an update on the current state of the BV path.

2 Usage

- 2.1 Use of the path is counted by five automated pressure pad and beam counters. This shows a rising trend of use; up by 45% since 2009. From these counts we estimate total use of the path is 350,000 to 500,000 visits per annum, mainly concentrated in the more urban sections of path, and expect these figures to rise as all partner authorities have identified areas close to, or even in, the Valley for residential development.

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Figure 1 Logger counts of BV Path

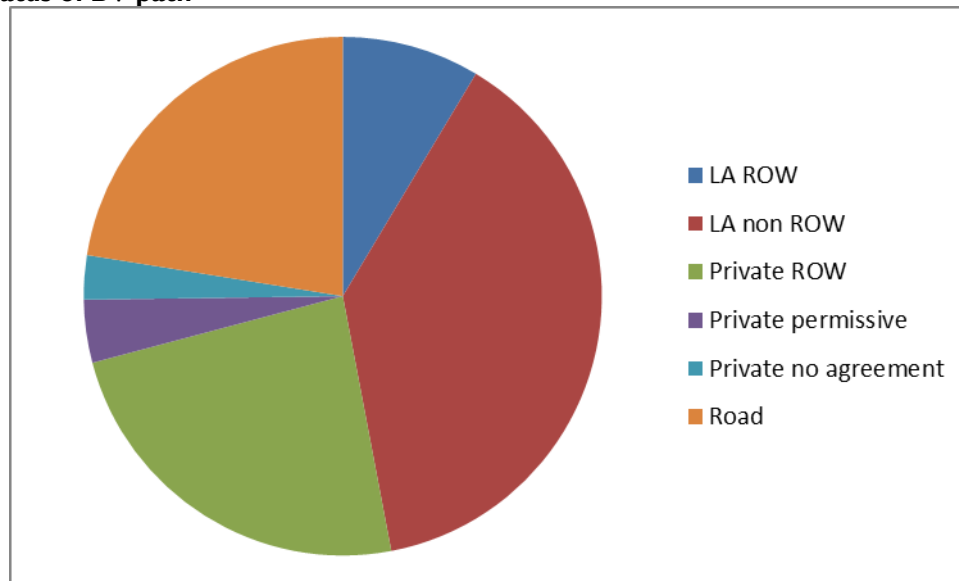


2.2 Cycling is allowed on much of the southern section. User surveys have shown that on these stretches around 50% of users are on bikes.

3 Issues

3.1 The difficulties in solving issues on the path can best be understood in six classes that are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Status of BV path



	Length km		Length km
Local Authority owned	17.4	Right of Way	3.2
		Permissive	14.2
Non Local Authority	11.3	Right of Way	8.8
		Permissive	1.5
		No agreement in place	1.0
Road and pavement	8.3		

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- 3.2 The sections in public ownership are mostly managed by us and considered secure. Whilst the aim is to get the whole path as a Right of Way this has not been seen by county ROW teams (who have many other issues to resolve) as a priority for the local authority owned sections.
- 3.3 Securing the non local authority owned sections is a priority to ensure the future of the path. Much of the rural northern section utilises pre existing rights of way, whilst it may be possible in future to reroute these closer to the riverside they already offer a pleasant walk.
- 3.4 Planning conditions have secured 4 km of BV path as a Right of Way on quarry sites.
- 3.5 Of greatest concern are the sections of path with no agreement in place or permissions that may be altered or withdrawn.

Two sections of path have permissive agreements:

- At Darby Green Meadows the path crosses land owned by Thames Water who gave permission. Thames Water is now looking to sell the land. Hampshire CC is in negotiation but if this fails a new landowner may withdraw permission.
- At Hollybush Pits Rushmoor BC secured a 50 year easement to allow pedestrian access. The new site owner has exercised his right to divert the path and close it to cyclists who had been using it for many years. The new route is away from the river and not a pleasant experience. The easement has 25 years to run with no guarantee of renewal.

3.6 Two sections have no agreement:

- At Darby Green, adjacent to the Thames Water land, the path was put in prior to finding the owner. New owners are now seeking development this does provide an opportunity although the site is largely SSSI and floodplain so options for development are limited.
- At Frimley Business Park the path was put in with a planning condition that it should be made a Right of Way, although constructed, it was never designated. The condition is probably no longer enforceable due to the passage of time.

3.7 A number of short sections that use road and pavements are unavoidable essential links and road crossings, however these could almost all be improved for safety with highway authority involvement.

A 2km section through Sandhurst town centre is the biggest break in the riverside route. Between Darby Green Road and Sandhurst / Yateley Road a planning condition for a lake infill scheme requires a permissive route to be constructed “prior to use of the lake for angling or canoeing”. The path has largely been constructed but the land owner has subsequently sub-leased the land until 30 September 2015 so it is unlikely we can proceed before then. Swan Lake Park SANG has opened this year; this contains a short section of riverside path that will be a key link once the above becomes accessible.

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Sandhurst / Yateley Road to Mill Lane remains a problem. A route here through Church Farm was offered during a planning application but not made a condition and land has subsequently been sold on. Future applications may provide an opportunity but at least two land ownerships will need to be involved.

There is potential to re-route a number of other roadside sections to provide a more pleasant or safer route although these would all need to cross private land.

4 Work in Progress

- 4.1 The BVC Trust has set up a Path Improvement Group. This has identified c.50 desirable improvements to the path or linking routes, from minor resurfacing projects to identifying new alternative sections.
- 4.2 Planning consent for a revised restoration scheme at Eversley Quarry has been granted. This provides for better links into the riverside path for the south but delays restoration date until 2020.
Revised quarry restoration schemes at Finchampstead that would secure improved routes have been submitted.
- 4.3 Surrey CC and Hampshire CC have approval in principal from LEP for “Blackwater Valley Better Connectivity” this would provide substantial funds in 2015-16 for improved cycling & pedestrian route with parts of the BV path benefitting.
- 4.4 SANG plans at Hawley Meadows, Rowhill, and Swan Lake Park have identified many access improvement projects including to the BV path. These will be implemented as funds and time become available.

5 Recommended action

- 5.1 Ensure the Path is included in Rights of Way Improvement Plans.
- 5.2 Look for opportunities e.g. new SANGs or planning applications to provide better routing of the BV Path.
- 5.3 Ensure planning officers include conditions that require new sections of paths to be opened to the public at an early stage of any development and to be dedicated as ROW.
- 5.4 Work with BVCT and local authority partners to prioritise the identified improvement schemes, seek funds and organise work.
- 5.5 Seek funds for a dedicated path project officer.

Steve Bailey
24/10/14

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Appendix I Blackwater Valley Access Improvement Plan 2014

Target dates are given where a realistic date for implementation is known

Projects that have a realistic chance of being completed 2014-15 are highlighted orange

BVC Trust lead in Blue

Section needs securing not Statutory

Grey =done

Ref	Proposal	Comment	Est cost	Priority	Target date
1	Improved signage to start of BV path	Rowhill volunteers have recently erected a carved signpost. But could still be made more visible	500-1,000	2	
1a	Improved signage Rowhill Parklands Grove entrance	Rowhill volunteers have recently erected a carved signpost and better gate for disabled users			Done 2014
2	Finger post at Road end of Parklands Grove	Post similar to others above would be helpful		2	
3	Alternative route to avoid Boxalls lane and awkward crossing of Eggars Hill Road	Would not tie in to proposal 4 Brook Ave is usable as is. Would need to cross unused land behind All Hallows school (owned by Surrey CC?)		3	
4	Alternative route of BV path through Badshot Lea Lakes	Route for path exists in west section to N of river but locals asked for it not to be used. East section would have to go through Farnham anglers land who like keeping private Would not tie in to proposal 3.		3	
5a	Improved gates at Farnham Quarry Pea bridge	Radar Gates To allow disabled access and encourage use.	400	2	Done 16.5.14
5b	Improved signage at Farnham Quarry Pea bridge once path is a through route	Need finger posts or similar		2	2015
6a	Gates as 5a above - Low lane	As 5a	400	2	Done July 2014
6b	Signs as 5a above - Low lane	Need finger posts	100	1	2015
7	Alternative route of BV path S of river through Farnham Quarry	Agreed with Hanson quarry owners. Site undergoing restoration completion due 2015 Will need a bridge to return to N bank at east end of Hanson ownership	1,000	2	2015

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Ref	Proposal	Comment	Est cost	Priority	Target date
8	Surfacing of 7	Keep priority under review as is muddy in winter		3	
8a	Two bridges to link across river	Useful even if BV path never officially diverted	5,000	1	2015
8b	Improve drainage on path in Hansons Wood	Only needed if 9 secured			
9	Alternative route of path to link Tongham Pool to quarry	Land held by developer, who is aware of need of route. Can we try and get this early?		1	With planning?
10	Surfaced path link in Aldershot Park	To create multi user section Pea Bridge to Ash Road	30-50,000	3	
11	Alternative route of BV path S of River by Tongham Pool	Land owned by Surrey CC. Route in de facto use by locals Water levels now high. If site is used as SANG funds would be available		2	
12	Surfacing of above	If we get permission from Surrey CC		2	
13	Route around Tongham Pool	Unsurfaced route proposed. Has been used in past but needs ownership, and water levels sorted first & scrub clearance		2	
13a	Link bridge, Tongham Pool Aldershot Park	If we get permission from Surrey CC		3	
14	New bridleway linking Badshot Lea to Tongham	Requested by local horse-riders but resisted by Farnham quarry owners. DMMO request has been submitted		3	
15	Improved crossing of Ash Road	For safety		1	
16	Improved surfacing through Hollybush Park			2	
17	Improved access for walkers to Chalk Farm	To be funded as part of SANG package 2014-18		1	2015
18	Signage & scrub clearance to improve link to Hollybush Park	MOD owned link path in wood. Path is in occasional use but poorly maintained.		3	
18/2	Hollybush Bridge approach	Short section needs resurfacing	200	1	2015
18/3	Sort out signage & surfacing of Hollybush lakes diversion	Work with Rushmoor BC , cheap & quick fix preferred	5,000-50,000	1	2014
18/4	Restore riverside path at Hollybush as cycle route			1	Long term -
19	Better management / veg clearance on Army land	Routes are well used but not looked after		2	
19/2	Resurface section at N camp station	Only short section east of river get muddy Not needed whilst path closed	200	1	2014
19/3	Drainage & surface South Street -	Blocked culvert needs sorting, and wet patches & raised manhole		3	2015

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Ref	Proposal	Comment	Est cost	Priority	Target date
	Lynchford road Link	covers are hazard.			
20	Alternative route N Camp station to Gerrys Copse	To avoid route adjacent to A331, will have to cross Mr Potters &/or Thames Water land		1	
20/1	Sort flooding on path S of Coleford Bridge	Flooded Dec 2013 – March 2014	10,000	2	2015
21	Repair surface Quays to Frimley Hatches	Potholes getting bigger, Funds from Network Rail being negotiated by HCC As a part Better Connectivity project?	15,000 1-2000 to patch	1	2015
22	Improve crossing of Frimley Road	Dangerous crossing, also bad landscape from previous road layout As a part Better Connectivity project?	high	1	2015
23	Improve gates for easy cycle access, Hawley Meadow	Is already used by cyclists in summer.	500	2	Completed 7.5.14
24	Create link to Cove Brook path	Long term aim, Need to cross rail line but how ? also crosses private land Existing link to south is unpleasant large detour		1	
24/a	Secure route through Frimley Business Park	Was agreed as part of original plan permission but never dedicated		2	
25	Surface section in Hawley Meadows suitable for all year multi use access	SANG funding is becoming available. Plan is to do in sections starting at wettest N end As a part Better Connectivity project?	secured	2	2015
26	New waymarked circular routes in Hawley Meadows	As part off SANG proposals, will be unsurfaced. Will be phased with some work planned for 2014.	Secured	1	2015
27	Improve signage over A30	Roundabout improvements planned need to speak to Highway engineers As a part Better Connectivity project		2	2015
27a	BV SSSI Improve cross valley path to sealed surface	Well used route by commuters that is often muddy in winter	20,000	2	
28	Darby Green Meadows Obtain agreement for use from absentee owner land	This is key to being able to improve management. Owner has regular rejected offers to buy or permissive agreement HCC / Hart in Talks		1	
29	Darby Green Meadows Secure route on TWA land	Currently permissive agreement for access use. HCC in talks		1	
29a	Darby Green V improve management of route	Fencing, surface & vegetation need work,		2	

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30	Sort out "blockage" of ROW Yateley 12	Allotments now on official route but better alternative in place. so serves no purpose. But as statutory route need official diversion or similar. YTC dealing	3,000	3	2015
31	Swan Lake Park grade & surface route of possible future BV path section	Part of new SANG opened Spring 2014. Route in place but would be better surfaced	4,000	1	2015
32	Bridge to link 31 & 33		2,000	1	2015
33	Open BV route in River Valley	Route has been built as a condition of planning for lake infill, delayed due to care home construction. Need to sort a few issues. Including access onto Sandhurst Road. Subleased to end sept 2015	Time	1	Sept 2015
34	Lakeside walk in River Valley	Route a condition of planning for lake infill but not yet constructed.		2	2015
35	Access to care home SANG	Planned as a condition of planning for care home construction started Nov 2013.		3	2016
35/1	Improve Yateley 13	May be part of BV path once River Valley route obtained.		1	2015
36	Signage of alternative section BV path	Once new section of River Valley section opened will need to sign improve on section to Horseshoe Lake using existing paths and quiet roads.	200	2	2015
37	Negotiate for alternative route of BV path at Church Farm	Owners did agree for permissive route to be implemented after gravel extraction but never implemented – will need new agreement.		2	
37/1	Yateley 502	Link route; resurface needed			
38	Upgrade path to bridleway status?	Assess need for bridleway here following on from the new access created Manor Farm		3	2018
39	New link path from ROW Yateley 1	As part of quarry restoration due end 2020		2	2019
40	New link path from ROW Eversley 23	As part of quarry restoration due end 2020		2	2019
41	Agree new routes and implement Manor Farm	As part of quarry restoration due end 2019 Include new bridleway & footpath, needs to tie into wildlife aims for site		1	2019
42	Agree new routes and implement Fleet Hill Farm	As part of quarry restoration due end 2019 Include new bridleway & footpath, needs to tie into wildlife aims for site		1	2019
43	Re open ancient Longwater Lane	Exits in Berkshire & part of route on ground in Hants		3	
44	Alternative route of BV path to	Difficult to achieve as crosses multiple privately held land parcels		3	

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Ref	Proposal	Comment	Est cost	Priority	Target date
	avoid busy Fleet Hill Road				
45	Alternative route of BV path closer to river to avoid road walking	Crosses private land, would require planning conditions to implement and unlikely here		3	
46	Alternative Route for BV path avoiding Nut Bean lane	Improved route alongside river away from road Owned by Farley Estates who have said no in past		3	
47	Alternative off road route for BV path avoiding Swallowfield Road	To avoid dangerous section of road & bridge. Could go inside field edge if got permission		1	
48	Alternative off road route for BV path avoiding Swallowfield Road	Is potential route in Swallowfield Park		2	
49	Better signage at end BV path	A nice finishing feature at Swallowfield Parish Hall would be nice		2	
50	Extend BV path to R Loddon	To complete riverside route along entire length of R Blackwater and to link into proposed Loddon River Walk. Need to speak to Wokingham DC		3	