

## SURVEY OF OPEN ACCESS LAND (Leicestershire Local Access Forum)

*Open Access, in the context of outdoor recreation, refers to the status and use of Access Land which is open country (mountain, moorland, heath and down) or registered Common Land to which the public normally have a right of access on foot under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000*

Name of site / location [ .....Burbage Common.....]

Date survey completed [ .....02/06/2015.....]

Report compiled by [ ..Terry Kirby.....]

### Overview

Open Access Areas under the CRoW Act comprise three parcels – OC86826 (open country), and RCL33148/33144 (registered common land). All three parcels are included within the larger area of publicly accessible land known as Burbage Common and Woods.

The CRoW Access Land consists of a mosaic of scrub and grassland. It is designated as a Local Nature Reserve. The adjacent SSSI does not include any of this access land.

There are no known features of archaeological interest within the site, although it appears that some of the shallow trenches in the grassland relate to World War II anti-invasion precautions, and the site also housed a rifle range in the same era.

The site is close to the large built-up areas of Burbage, Hinckley, Barwell and Earl Shilton, and is heavily used by local residents, particularly to exercise dogs. With the provision of good car parking and two cafes at either end of the area, it is a popular social meeting place for a large number of people, who appear generally to appreciate and respect the facility.

Several public footpaths and one bridleway cross the area, hence the large number of official access points.

### Land Management and / or ownership if known

Managed by Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC) under an Environmental Stewardship Scheme, although parcel RCL33144 is outside the boundary of the HLS agreement.

The Management Plan for Burbage Common and Woods 2011-2016 is available to view or download on the HBBC website and is attached to this survey for detailed information. All the CRoW Access Land is covered by the plan, but not separately identified as such within it.

### Accessibility

Locations marked OE on map are official entry points- IE are informal entry points

Are the entry / exit points safe? Are there any impediments, barriers or fencing?

No entry/exit points have stiles – all are either easily opened kissing or handgates, or through

gaps in the boundary.

One possible safety concern is that the kissing gate into parcel OC86826 is a short distance along the highway from the Visitor Centre Car Park along Burbage Common Road, which becomes derestricted before the gate is reached.

Is there any local parking by or near official entry points? State if on or off road.

Two car parks are provided off Burbage Common Road – the main one adjacent to the Visitor Centre, and what is regarded as the ‘overflow’ car park to the SE, with access to part of the managed site including the newly created wildlife ponds which is not designated CRow Access Land, but with free well-marked access to parcel RCL33148 adjacent to the railway bridge.

Off-road parking provision on designated verges on Smithy Lane gives access to parcel RCL33144 via the bridleway, or via Burbage Woods.

All the official car parks have height barriers which preclude their use by horse boxes, although one of the Access Areas is crossed by a bridleway and a permissive circular riding route has been designated by HBBC.

## Safety

Are there a) any natural hazards which should display warnings, and b) any man made safety issues which could be improved

a) None within the designated access areas

b) None within the designated access areas

An annual site-wide risk assessment forms part of the HBBC Management Plan

## Special considerations

Are there animals grazing the area? Is the area suitable for dogs? Is there a suitable entry point for the less able?

Are there litter bins, dog waste bins?

Parcel OC86826 is grazed under a formal agreement with HBBC – by donkeys at the time of our survey, and dogs are not welcome in this area. The RCL parcels are very appropriate, and indeed very-heavily used, by dog

walkers.

The main entry points adjacent to the car parks are suitable for the less able. Although the whole area is relatively flat, and would offer no difficulty for 'all-terrain' mobility aids, no special provision or surfacing has been made for wheelchairs.

Litter and dog-waste bins are provided adjacent to the Visitor Centre. There was little evidence of litter or dog waste throughout the site.

## Signage

- Are all official entry points marked as 'Open Access'? [NO]
- Where the area is part of a larger area of public access,  
is there any indication that the part in question is 'Open Access'? [NO]
- Has the site any interpretation boards or other information points [YES]

## Additional Information

A circular route for horse-riders, using bridleway U51 in part, has been designated by HBBC and marked by yellow-topped posts.

A regular bus service (up to 3 per hour) passes close to the Visitor Centre Entrance on six days per week.

The site, being part of a managed country park, is well-signposted from local roads.

A sympathetically designed, utilising wood wherever possible, children's play area, adjoins the visitor centre, and shows little sign of vandalism, just normal wear and tear.

A free illustrated leaflet covering the HBBC managed site, is available from the Visitor Centre, as is information regarding the permanent orienteering course.

The Leicestershire Round 100-mile Long Distance Footpath, crosses the Access Land

The site plan shows a 'Path' linking parcel OC86826 with dead-end PROW V22 to the north. This is not shown on the definitive map as a right-of-way.

We were accompanied on our survey visit by Paul Scraggs of HBBC, who clarified many of the points we raised, and noted informally many of the suggestions we have made below. Thanks to Paul for making himself available in this way.

## Suggestions

1.HBBC provide very good and well-maintained information boards throughout the site, particularly at the principal

entry points from the car parks – it would seem appropriate and unintrusive to attach ‘Access Land’ signage to those which are within the designated access land, or to PWOV waymark posts where no information board is adjacent. We would not wish to see additional posts erected.

2. Several PROVs cross the site, and waymarking for these is inconsistent, and indeed inaccurate at the location immediately north of the railway bridge. Yellow-topped posts also exist to mark the designated riding route. It is suggested that these should be blue-topped in line with recognised bridleway colour-coding to avoid confusion. Additional PROV waymarkers are required where these diverge from mown paths.

3. Part of the permissive horse route passes through a narrow ‘tunnel’ between Sheepy Wood and an outlying copse, and this stretch is poorly drained and difficult on foot. As it is also part of footpath U8b it is suggested that the permissive horse route be re-aligned to avoid this stretch.

4. Some promotion of the accessibility of the site by public transport could relieve pressure on the car parks. Currently there is only a bus stop near to the Visitor Centre for buses proceeding towards Hinckley – a corresponding stop for buses travelling in the opposite direction is required.

5. No specific surfaced routes suitable for wheelchairs have been provided. Consideration should be given to the provision of such a route from the Visitor Centre without compromising the natural experience of the open common land.

6. Parcels RCL33148 and RCL33144 are linked by a rail underbridge which is a heavily-used ‘pinch-point’ for all types of user and has seasonal surface problems, aggravated by drainage of water from the rail track above. Some consideration should be given to providing a permanent hard-surface under the bridge, with possible assistance from Network Rail.

7. The HBBC leaflet referred to above requires some updating, and improving in quality. The original glossy professionally printed original is now being locally re-copied and/or computer printed to meet demand.

8. The historic status of the path shown leading from parcel OC86826 should be researched, and it should be designated if possible – it would improve pedestrian access to the site from the PROV network based on Elmesthorpe.

9. ‘Pedestrian’ road warning signs should be provided along Burbage Common Road approaching the Visitor Centre along the derestricted part of the road.

10. The original draft LCC plan mentioned the possible need for a ‘Fire Plan. I can find no reference to this within the HBBC Site Management Plan. We would like confirmation that either this need has been rejected, or that a separate document has been prepared by HBBC.

11. As the permissive equestrian route provides a much needed local amenity, and the approach roads are busy due to their proximity to large urban areas and therefore unsafe for riders, formal provision should be provided for parking of horse boxes, to avoid the informal and unpopular use of Burbage Common Road adjacent to the Visitor Centre. This area should not conflict with the needs of other users of Burbage Common.