

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at Lancing Parish Hall on 8th April 2009.

Present:

Mr Bill Acraman	Mr Peter Brown (Chairman)	
Mrs Tricia Butcher	Mrs Helen Baldwin	Mr Chris Boocock
Mr Martin Reynolds	Mr Glynn Jones (V/C)	Mr Trevor Passmore
Mr David Whyberd	Mr David Ribbens	Mr Peter Tompkins
	Mr Anthony Young	

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Officers: Craig Bowdery, Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Christine Luff and Jane Noble. Also present was James Ort (South Downs Access Forum)

Apologies were received from Phil Belden, Derek Deedman, Dave Evans, Nigel Sloan, Sue Strudwick, Alan White and Shirley Wright.

Chairman's Welcome

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting, and reported that he was very sorry to learn that his predecessor as Chairman, Ronnie Perrin, had resigned from the Forum. The Chairman highlighted Ronnie's outstanding contribution over the years as she fought to protect and improve access to the countryside. Members agreed that the Chairman should write to Ronnie to express the Forum's gratitude and appreciation of her hard work.

Declarations of interest

2. There were none.

Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

3. Resolved –

- i) That Peter Brown be elected as Chairman of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex for the 2009/10 year, and
- ii) That Glynn Jones be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex for the 2009/10 year.

Minutes of the last meeting

4. Tricia Butcher requested that the words 'at Slaugham' be inserted after 'tunnel' in minute 152. The Forum approved Tricia's request.

5. Resolved –
That subject to the revision of minute 152, the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting on 29th January 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Actions and matters arising not covered by the agenda

6. With reference to minute 146, the Chairman informed members that the **website working group** would be meeting on 22nd April, and that the Forum would be informed of the outcomes of the discussion and any proposals for the future. The Forum were also informed that the **CAFWS Position Statement**

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discussed in minute 165 had been revised following members' comments, and that this would be appearing on the CAFWS webpages soon.

7. Glynn Jones reported on **access to Forestry Commission land**, following the discussion at the previous meeting reported in minute 171. Glynn explained that he had taken the issue to the South East Local Access Forum (SELAF) to escalate CAFWS's concerns to the larger regional body. Prior to the meeting, CAFWS's representative on the SELAF, Matthew Balfour, contacted the District Manager for the Forestry Commission and had received a response which was circulated to members. The response suggested a meeting to discuss CAFWS's concerns in detail, which Glynn felt would be an appropriate next step. Members noted their multiple concerns with regards to access to Forestry Commission land, such as the administration of permits, excluding groups of users through the use of height barriers and the apparent unwillingness to support public access to publicly owned land. Glynn undertook to raise these issues during the meeting, and it was agreed that the neighbouring LAFs also be invited to participate. It was also highlighted that if members had any suggestions for specific examples of where access in Forestry commission woods (freehold or leasehold) could be improved particularly relating to safety, it would be useful if these could be provided to Jane and Glynn before the meeting with the Forestry Commission.

Urgent matters

8. At the Chairman's request, members agreed that the response to West Sussex County Council's (WSCC) Minerals & Waste Core Strategy Development Plan would be considered under agenda item 12, 'Current/future consultations'.

9. The Chairman also reported that the Secretary of State had announced that the **South Downs would be designated a National Park**. Bill Acraman was invited to comment on the announcement, and he outlined WSCC's position on the new South Downs National Park. The County Council now accepted the boundaries as they had been proposed, but were more concerned with the governance arrangements for the National Park Authority. It was expected that just over half of the Authority would be formed of locally elected members, with the remainder being Natural England appointees. It was felt that as the largest portion of the National Park would be within West Sussex, it would be reasonable for WSCC to have the largest representation of County Councillors. Bill Acraman also explained that there needed to be careful consideration of the duties that the National Park would adopt. For example the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) was currently responsible for rights of way maintenance on the South Downs in West Sussex, but there was not a formal agreement for this. WSCC were also cautious that there had yet to be any indication of how the National Park Authority would be funded. Lisa Creaye-Griffin explained that the statutory instrument for the designation was expected in autumn 2009, which should provide some more details.

10. Trevor Passmore highlighted that a statutory duty of a National Park was the promotion of economic and social wellbeing, but that this appeared to be absent in the announcement. Trevor also stated that the guidance on LAFs indicated that a LAF cannot be established in an area where another LAF already existed. This was particularly relevant as it was assumed that there would be a full South Downs LAF created, however the area was currently covered by CAFWS. Members agreed that an update on the South Downs National Park would be a standing item on CAFWS agendas until the Park was fully established.

West Sussex Rights of Way annual report

11. The Forum received a presentation from Jon Perks, Principal Rights of Way Officer for WSCC. Jon reported on the work of his team, which included a nine month routine inspection and maintenance cycle and work such as vegetation clearance, the replacement of way markers, path resurfacing, bridge maintenance and the replacement of stiles.

12. Trevor Passmore asked who was responsible for the maintenance of rights of way in the South Downs AONB as someone had been cutting through fences near his farm. Jon explained that in the AONB, the SDJC maintained the rights of way, but that this particular case sounded like it was a matter for the Police. Glynn Jones asked how Jon's team had contributed to the aspirations of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), and Jon explained that all aspects of their work indirectly contributed to the RoWIP. However it was noted that the RoWIP had not directly created any new projects for them thus far, and that there were no specific projects planned for 2009/10. The Chairman asked whether the rights of way budget could be re-directed to deliver on such projects, and Jon explained that whilst this was possible, any decisions would have to be assessed and prioritised against other commitments.

13. David Ribbens highlighted that his parish council (Plaistow and Ifold) had recently worked with the WSCC Rights of Way Team to secure some resurfacing work on a local path. In order to ensure that the work was carried out, the parish council contributed financially, which meant that the work was scheduled a lot sooner than it would have been if the County Council was paying for the project in its entirety. Jon explained that there were some very active parish councils who worked with his team to maintain the rights of way network, but there were very few who contributed financially in this way.

14. Christine Luff gave a verbal report to update members on the work of the Rights of Way Committee and the recent improvements to countryside access that it had agreed. For example at its February meeting, the Committee approved the widening of a footpath in Felpham as part of the safer routes to school initiative, approved an important bridleway link proposal at Christ's Hospital and a new footpath link at Sompting, which would open up access to the South Downs and beyond. It also approved proposals for new paths at Plaistow and Upper Beeding and established two new village greens at Goring and Horsham. At its April meeting, the Committee secured improvements for users of two footpaths affected by the proposed Bognor Regis Relief Road as well as approving a proposal for a new bridleway at Rudgwick.

Working Groups

15. The Chairman informed the Forum that in light of Ronnie Perrin's resignation from CAFWS, the Promotion of Walking in West Sussex working group required a new Chairman and new members. Members agreed that Glynn Jones should join the group as Chairman, and that Anthony Young would join the cycling working group.

Sub Forums

Terms of Reference for the sub-forums

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16. Members noted the draft Revised Terms of Reference for the sub-forums (copy appended to the signed minutes) and agreed that with reference to paragraph five, sub-forum members would be appointed by CAFWS, with WSCC's approval. The Chairman informed members that the Terms of Reference would now be sent to WSCC's legal services for guidance and that following this they would be circulated to all Forum and sub-forum members. Trevor Passmore asked why the Terms of Reference did not include the South Downs Access Forum (SDAF), which was a sub-forum of CAFWS (as well as the LAFs in East Sussex, Hampshire and Brighton and Hove). The Chairman explained that due to its different relationship to its 'mother forums', the SDAF had different Terms of Reference from the other sub-forums. It had been decided that it would therefore be more appropriate to review the SDAF Terms of Reference once the implications of the South Downs National Park were known. Trevor requested a copy of the SDAF Terms of Reference as they currently stood, and Jane Noble undertook to provide them.

Recent meetings of the sub forums

17. The Chairman thanked David Ribbens and the new members of the Low Weald Sub Forum for their contribution and members noted the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2009 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

18. Glynn Jones updated members on the work of the South Downs Access Forum and its recent meeting and site visit. At the meeting members participated in a car park identification exercise where members were asked to utilise their local knowledge to identify car parks on maps. The exercise proved to be beneficial for both SDJC staff and the SDAF members. James Ort had also developed a spreadsheet to incorporate all South Downs RoWIP project suggestions. He would be meeting with Jane Noble and the RoWIP Officers from neighbouring authorities to see if this could be used by all relevant partners. James also reported that Natural England had expressed interest in using the spreadsheet to assist with their assessment of HLS (Higher Level Stewardship) funding. Trevor Passmore reported that he had been informed that if a landowner received HLS funding for opening their farm for access, there was a requirement for the landowner to comply with a range of complex regulations including two-yearly inspections of all livestock. James agreed to investigate the issue with Natural England and to report back to Trevor.

South East Local Access Forum

19. Glynn Jones updated the Forum on the recent meeting of the SELAF, which met on 3rd March 2009. Issues discussed at the meeting included gating orders, the SELAF Terms of Reference, the agenda for the English Access Forum (on which there was nothing of significant relevance to CAFWS) and the prospect of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act being reviewed in 2014/15.

20. The Chairman also reported that following this meeting there was a conference that was open to all LAF members in the South East. At the conference Matthew Balfour (the South East's representative on the EAF) explained the new structure and his hope that LAFs would use their regional forums as a means of escalating issues onto the national agenda. The conference also featured an update on the Coastal Access Bill, which was still passing through Parliament and the proposals were expected to be acted upon over a five year period. Following this there were a range of useful themed workshops covering many different topics. Bill

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Acraman asked if attendance at such conferences was useful or productive, and the Chairman explained that there was significant benefit in networking and hearing how other areas promote access.

Current/future strategic developments

21. Tricia Butcher reported on her work with the Highways Agency (HA) on the **A23 Handcross to Warnlinglid Widening Scheme**. Tricia had had a positive meeting with WSCC and then the HA and felt that her views and arguments had been listened to and considered. The HA had agreed to provide a multi-use surfaced path on the verge adjacent to the northbound off-slip at Handcross, to safely link BW 7 to the B2110 Horsham Road, and they were also now drawing up a range of alternative proposals to incorporate the views of everyone who had objected or suggested alterations. There would now be a public inquiry on 16th June to consider the plans. Tricia also thanked Bill Acraman for arranging the meetings and for his input in the discussions.

22. The Forum also noted the CAFWS response to Horsham District Council in relation to two planning applications for the land south of Horsham at Broadbridge Heath.

Current/future consultations

23. The Forum noted the CAFWS response to Natural England's Review of Trails and Routes consultation, which was discussed and then revised at the previous meeting.

24. The Forum also received a draft response to the Department of Transport's consultation on the **Local Transport Plan 3 Guidance**. Jane Noble thanked Tricia Butcher for her work on this consultation, which had formed the basis for the draft response. It was suggested and agreed that the response should also include requests that carriage drivers be included in the user groups listed on page 26, paragraph 2.45 and on page 46, paragraph 3.49. Members also expressed the view that the Local Transport Plan needed to involve LAFs a lot more and to give a much greater emphasis on rights of way. Chris Boocock highlighted that the amount of funding dedicated to maintaining the road network was out of proportion when compared to the money spent on the rights of way network, especially when the number of people using each network was considered. Chris felt that it was important to emphasise this point in the response and it was agreed that he should provide some figures to be included in the response. Members also agreed that the term 'wheelchair users' should be replaced with 'people with mobility issues'.

25. Jane also updated the Forum on the consultation regarding **open access land at Sullington**. Unfortunately Natural England had not yet provided full details of this consultation. There would be an initial consultation period ending 1st June and a CAFWS response to this would be managed by email and post. The response to the full consultation would be discussed at CAFWS's July meeting.

26. The Forum also noted the urgent matter of the response to the **Minerals & Waste Core Strategy Plan Document** from WSCC. Jane again thanked Tricia Butcher for her work on this consultation. Tricia explained that as this was to become a core strategy it would be referred to in the future whenever planning applications were made, and therefore it was important to ensure that rights of

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way were protected in it. Helen Baldwin also requested that carriage drivers be included in the list of user groups in the letter's fifth paragraph.

General Report

27. Members noted the General Report (copy appended to the signed minutes) and Jane Noble thanked Martin Reynolds for his contribution to the update on the Marine and Coastal Access Bill and the members who contributed to the production of the 'Countryside News' article that was to be included in the summer edition of *Exploring West Sussex*. The General Report featured updates on the following areas:

- The County Council's Rights of Way Committee
- Open Access Land: Access Management Grant Scheme 2009/10
- The Marine and Coastal Access Bill
- The South Downs National Park
- CAFWS promoting access to the countryside
- The West Sussex Rural Forum
- The England Access Forum
- Neighbouring LAFs

Agenda items for the next meeting of the Forum

28. The Chairman informed members that the next CAFWS meeting would be broadly themed around the South Downs with items on the SDJC's Rights of Way and Countryside Access General Report, the South Downs Access Forum's RoWIP database and the car park mapping for the South Downs.

Matters for information

29. The Chairman reminded members that following the meeting CAFWS was hosting a workshop on encouraging town and parish councils to play a greater role in countryside access.

30. Glynn Jones reported that the National Trust's **Woolbeeding Estate** now had a new manager who was likely to be more welcoming to requests for improved access. The South Downs Society's access group had been successful in establishing some new permissive access routes on the Estate, but these only catered for pedestrian access. Glynn suggested that CAFWS should write to recommend that access for cyclists and equestrians be improved, however it was agreed that it would be more appropriate for Glynn to raise the issue with the SDJC.

Date of next meeting

31. The Forum agreed that the next CAFWS meeting would be at 10:15am on Wednesday 15th July 2009 at Church Farm, Coombes, Lancing. Subsequent meetings were also agreed as:

- Wednesday 28th October 2009
- Wednesday 27th January 2010

The meeting closed at 12:58pm.

The Chairman