

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at Washington Village Hall on 21st July 2010

Present:

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Mr Peter Brown (Chairman) | | |
| Mr Bill Acraman | Mrs Helen Baldwin | Mr David Burden |
| Mrs Tricia Butcher | Mr Duncan Crow | Mr Dave Evans |
| Mr Glynn Jones (V/C) | Mr Martin Reynolds | Mr Robin Rogers |
| Mr Peter Tompkins | Mr Ted White | Mr Anthony Young |

Apologies were received from David Whyberd, Chris Boocock, Nigel Sloan, Ann Janes and Phil Belden.

In attendance:

| | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Sue Batstone | - | Natural England |
| Michael Blencowe | - | Natural England |
| Craig Bowdery | - | WSCC, Democratic Services |
| Lisa Creaye-Griffin | - | WSCC, Rural Operations |
| Nigel James | - | South Downs Joint Committee |
| Jane Noble | - | Forum Officer (WSCC, Senior Access Officer) |
| Matt Pitts | - | High Weald AONB Unit |

Chairman's welcome

31. The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and reported that since the previous meeting of the Forum, Shirley Wright, Trevor Passmore and Sue Strudwick had resigned. It was noted that new members would not be recruited until the arrangement for the South Downs Local Access Forum had been confirmed.

Declarations of interest

32. With regard to agenda item 11 (Current/future strategic developments) Robin Rogers declared a personal interest as a member of Worthing Borough Council.

Minutes of the last meeting

33. With reference to minute 26, it was highlighted that the Burgess Hill Green Circle Project did not provide rights of way and routes, but worked to identify potential routes. It was therefore agreed that the word 'provide' in the second sentence of minute 26 should be altered to 'identify'.

34. **Resolved** –
That subject to the alteration above, the minutes of the Forum meeting held on 28th April 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Actions and matters arising

35. Following the discussion reported in minute 5, members noted that West Sussex County Council's website would be re-launched in the coming months. As

such members of the Forum would be invited to comment upon the CAFWS webpages at its meeting in November.

36. The Forum received a copy of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy's letter thanking the Forum for its work identifying priority projects for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Members noted the Cabinet Member's support for the identified projects.

37. With reference to minute 6, Lisa Creaye-Griffin reported that the programme for the upcoming West Sussex Food and Countryside Festival was being printed and would be available soon. The Festival would be taking place between the 8th and 10th October in Steyning and the walks programme was to be organised jointly by Footprints, Per-Rambulations and WSCC.

Urgent matters

38. There were no urgent matters.

Higher Level Stewardship – Access benefits

39. The Forum received a presentation from Sue Batstone, Open Access Advisor for Natural England, outlining the potential access benefits that could be realised through the Higher Level Stewardship scheme (HLS). HLS was funded predominantly by the European Union and successful applicants were paid to manage their land in accordance with certain agreed options.

40. Sue explained that schemes to protect and promote the historic environment, biodiversity, landscape, access and resource protection were all covered by HLS through agreements that lasted for ten years. Access schemes via HLS did not create permanent rights of way, but could allow public access on a concessionary basis. HLS access options included the establishment of permissive open access, a permissive footpath or bridleway, permissive easy access routes, upgrades to bridleways or easy access routes, and supporting educational access. Funding was also available for capital items such as kissing gates or hard standing for disabled paths. It was highlighted however that the HLS funding for 2011/12 and beyond was not yet known and could be significantly impacted upon as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn.

41. Sue also explained that as part of the application process, the relevant local access forum should be consulted and comments invited. Members explained that this was not occurring and it was agreed that all HLS applications would be sent to the Forum Officer to consider the Forum's input.

Action: Michael Blencowe and Jane Noble

42. In response to members' queries, Sue explained that landowners who were successful in an HLS application signed a ten year agreement, with an opt-out clause after five year. During the ten years the agreement could be amended slightly or extended with agreement from the landowner and Natural England. Members also commented that the promotion of permissive routes appeared to work against the stated objective of creating permanent rights of way. It was however accepted that securing a permissive route for ten years was preferable to no route at all.

43. Members noted the difficulty in promoting the existence of permissive routes. Sue explained that as temporary routes, Ordnance Survey was unwilling to map the permissive routes created by HLS, but that Natural England provided signs to highlight routes on the ground. It was suggested that closer work with parish councils could help to raise awareness of permissive routes in their areas. Sue highlighted that details of all HLS paths are shown on the 'country walks' website at <http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk>. Jane Noble undertook to bring a hard copy to the next meeting. It was also suggested that in future the CAFWS webpages could link to details of all permissive routes in West Sussex, as the internet platform was less permanent and more easily updated.

Action: Jane Noble

44. Nigel James informed the Forum that the SDJC was consulted on all HLS applications and were often able to make suggestions that improved access. In Nigel's experience however the hardest task was monitoring the projects after the funding had been agreed and awarded to ensure that landowners were fulfilling their obligations. Sue explained that Natural England was responsible for monitoring the projects for the duration of the agreements, but that due to limited resources this was not always possible.

High Weald AONB Unit

45. The Forum received a presentation from Matt Pitts, Cultural Landscape Advisor from the High Weald AONB Unit, outlining the work in the High Weald. Matt explained that the role of the Unit was to advise local authorities and that it had no statutory powers. He also outlined the history and cultural significance of many of the routes in the High Weald and the work underway to protect them. Members commented that as many of the routes were so significant to the area's heritage, they would benefit from being designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments and should be protected as such.

South Downs National Park progress report

46. Lisa Creaye-Griffin gave a verbal report on the recent decisions taken by the South Downs National Park Authority (NPA). At its meeting on 15th June, the NPA had agreed that planning services should be delivered through agency agreements with the fifteen local authorities in the Downs. The agreement would effectively delegate the consideration of minor planning applications to the district and borough councils, with the major applications being considered by the NPA. The local authorities would all need to approve the agreements but such a system was expected to be in operation for April 2011. At the same meeting the NPA had also agreed to adopt an on-the-ground customer engagement service that was expected to include some form of ranger service and volunteer support.

47. Lisa highlighted that WSCC and other organisations were having difficulty liaising with the NPA as it did not yet have any permanent staff. SDJC staff were expecting to be informed whether they would be able to transfer to the NPA by the end of July, with some external recruitment taking place in September. Some permanent staff should therefore be in place by the next CAFWS meeting. Lisa also reported that members of the South Downs Access Forum's sounding board

had been invited to submit expressions of interest to join the new statutory local access forum, although there had not yet been a public advertisement.

Future management of rights of way in West Sussex from April 2011

48. Jane Noble explained that following the decision not to delegate rights of way maintenance responsibility to the NPA, WSCC was working to develop a model to deliver rights of way services across the whole of the county. Members noted that the afternoon workshop session would consider the issue in greater detail. As chairman of the WSCC Members' Working Group guiding the work, Bill Acraman emphasised that there had not yet been a final decision on what the service should look like, and that he was keen to receive input from the Forum.

Sub Forums

49. The Chairman reported that the Coastal Plain Sub Forum would be meeting on 13th August, when a representative from Sustrans would be attending, and invited the other sub forum chairmen to give an update on their work. Peter Tompkins reported on the Low Weald Sub Forum's meeting of 14th July and expressed his disappointment that an access ranger did not attend. Peter explained that although a written update was provided, the ranger's presence allowed for a much more meaningful dialogue so they should be encouraged to attend as often as possible. The Sub Forum's concern at the apparent lack of progress against the six identified Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) projects was also reported. Tricia Butcher reported on the High Weald Sub Forum and also expressed concern at the limited ranger attendance and overall poor communication from WSCC. The High Weald was supported well by the local access rangers, but Tricia explained that members felt communication could be greatly improved.

50. Jane Noble explained that the access rangers were encouraged to attend the sub forum meetings when they could, but that time pressures did not always allow this and that they had to prioritise their work accordingly. It was highlighted that communication could take place between meetings by phone or email, but recognised that this might not always be sufficient. Jane undertook to review the ranger workloads to explore the possibility of assigning more time to attend sub forum meetings. The Chairman explained that WSCC had limited resources and encouraged sub forums to look at their projects and identify if members could be more pro-actively involved in facilitating their delivery.

51. The Forum commented that there did not appear to be a process in place to ensure that the RoWIP projects identified by the sub forums would be delivered. It was also argued that there appeared to be limited progress against any of the outcomes in the RoWIP. Jane explained that the strategic aims and ethos of the RoWIP, as suggested and supported by CAFWS during its production, had been embraced by the County Council, but that limited resources had meant slow progress delivering priority projects identified by the sub forums. Lisa Creaye-Griffin suggested that the way in which RoWIP achievements are reported might not be clear enough and undertook to review how this could be communicated.

Action: Jane Noble

Current/future strategic developments

52. The Forum noted the responses sent to consultations on the Kilnwood Vale development and the Worthing Core Strategy; and Jane Noble undertook to circulate the response sent to the consultation on a new Planning Policy Statement: Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment. Jane also drew members' attention to the General Report (copy appended to the signed minutes), which explained the Government's recent changes to regional spatial planning strategies. The South East Plan had been abolished and as such the housing targets within it no longer needed to be adhered to. The Government's intention was for spatial planning to be more closely controlled by local authorities. Members highlighted that the South East Plan included some very positive access policies, and that CAFWS should seek to ensure that such policies are incorporated into the Local Development Framework documents within West Sussex.

Current/future consultations

53. The Forum considered a response to a consultation on the role of the England Access Forum (EAF) and agreed that a response in line with the suggestions reported in the General Report (copy appended to the signed minutes) be sent. The Forum's view was that the EAF should be supported as it provided an opportunity for local access forums to share experiences and knowledge and provided government and non-governmental organisations a national consultee. It was also suggested that EAF could campaign for LAFs to become statutory consultees for some issues.

54. Jane Noble also invited members' comments on West Sussex County Council's public consultation of the third Local Transport Plan (LTP3). The consultation document was available on the County Council's website with a response deadline of 23rd September 2010. Members wishing to submit comments and views to the Forum Officer were invited to do so by 15th September.

Action: All members / Jane Noble

Forestry Commission Access Group

55. Tricia Butcher informed the Forum that the CAFWS Forestry Commission Access Group had chosen to use Eartham Wood as a case study and had met on-site with a landowner representative (National Trust) to consider access improvements for the site. Several potential improvements had been identified including altering the height barrier to the car park, two additional permissive bridleways, a welcome leaflet for the site and appropriate waymarking to reduce accidental trespassing. The suggested improvements were supported by the Forum, and it was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Forestry Commission, copying in other local access forums in the South East, highlighting the opportunities for the site.

Action: Glynn Jones / Tricia Butcher

General Report

56. Members received the General Report (copy appended to the signed minutes) which detailed items of interest for the Forum, including consultations,

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

spatial planning changes, spending reductions, the Rights of Way Committee and neighbouring local access forums.

Agenda items for future meetings of the Forum

57. The Forum noted that the following items would be considered at a future meeting of the Forum:

- South Downs National Park Authority
- Health walks
- CAFWS / countryside access webpages
- Future of rights of way in West Sussex
- Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Date of next meeting

58. Members noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Wednesday 10th November at 10:15am in Capron House, Midhurst. The subsequent meeting would take place on 2nd February 2011 in County Hall North, Horsham.

The meeting closed at 12:36pm

The Chairman