

**Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)**

At a meeting of the Forum held at Capron House, Midhurst on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2010

Present:

Mr Peter Brown (Chairman)		
Mr Bill Acraman	Mrs Helen Baldwin	Mrs Tricia Butcher
Mr Glynn Jones (V/C)	Mr Martin Reynolds	Mr Robin Rogers
Mr Peter Tompkins	Mr Anthony Young	

Apologies were received from Ted White, David Whyberd, David Burden, Dave Evans, Chris Boocock, Duncan Crow and Phil Belden.

In attendance:

Liz Ballard	-	South Downs National Park Authority
Craig Bowdery	-	WSCC, Democratic Services
Lisa Creaye-Griffin	-	WSCC, Rural Operations
Jane Noble	-	Forum Officer (WSCC, Senior Access Officer)
Jon Perks	-	WSCC, Rights of Way

**Declarations of interests**

59. There were no declarations of interest.

**Minutes of the last meeting**

60. **Resolved –**

That the minutes of the Forum meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**Actions and matters arising**

61. With reference to minute 35, the Forum Officer informed the Forum that the County Council's new website had been launched. The new pages currently used the same information as the old site and as such the Forum Officer invited comments and suggestions for improvement for the Forum's pages ([www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws)). The Forum also noted that the Interactive Map iMap ([www.westsussex.gov.uk/imap](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/imap)) function on the website had been changed. The iMap was still being developed so some further improvements would be possible when the next version was rolled out. Members agreed that a key aspiration of the iMap should be to allow the printing of maps and the ability for a user to plot their own route.

62. Following the discussion reported in minute 43, the Forum Officer circulated a list of permissive routes and access in West Sussex provided for by Countryside Stewardship, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Environmental Stewardship Schemes. Members asked whether such routes could be added to the developing iMap on WSCC's website. The Forum Officer explained that permissive routes that were created through an agreement between the landowner and WSCC were already incorporated. However many permissive routes were created in agreement with Defra and these were not currently on the map, although she agreed to investigate whether a link to these would be

possible. Members also suggested that a list of permissive routes with an end date to the agreement should be available on the website. In response to a member's question, Jon Perks confirmed that when a new permissive route was created it was added to the Access Ranger's programme of inspections (if it was created by an agreement with WSCC).

**Action: Jane Noble**

### **Urgent matters**

63. There were no urgent matters. The Chairman informed the Forum that the discussion on the Gatwick Flood Alleviation Scheme would be brought forward to allow Jon Perks to present the item before leaving for another commitment.

### **Current/future strategic developments**

#### *Gatwick Flood Alleviation Scheme*

64. Jon Perks, Principal Rights of Way Officer, WSCC, gave a verbal report on the Environment Agency's (the EA) proposals to alleviate the flood risk of the River Mole near Ifield. The EA were proposing five schemes, one of which would impact on the rights of way in the area by building a dam that would increase the risk of flooding for several paths. A planning application from the EA was expected in January or February 2011. Mr Perks highlighted that the creation of the dam would effectively cause an obstruction to the rights of way, which could be classified as a Common Law offence, and as such WSCC would be looking for a number of mitigating proposals such as the creation of new routes.

65. The Forum discussed the proposals and agreed that whilst the likelihood of flooding was still relatively low; access improvements should be sought in recompense for the potential losses to the rights of way network. For example a multi-user route across the dam should be requested, as well as retention of a rights of way link between Ifield and Ifield Wood. It was agreed that the Forum Officer should write to the EA outlining CAFWS's views and emphasising that any temporary closures during works should be phased to minimise disruption and that CAFWS would appreciate the opportunity to comment on the planning application.

**Action: Jane Noble**

### **WSCC Public Rights of Way Review**

66. The Forum noted a paper submitted to the Strategic Environmental Services Select Committee (copy appended to the signed minutes) outlining the proposed service delivery model for rights of way management in West Sussex. The Chairman welcomed the proposals, which included a nine monthly inspection cycle and an increased use of volunteers for both inspections and practical work and did not seek to prioritise paths in a hierarchy of perceived importance.

67. Jon Perks explained that the proposals were developed by a members' working group that considered the existing methods of delivery both within the former South Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty and elsewhere in West Sussex. Views of a wide variety of stakeholders were also sought and considered before a new service model was developed. Mr Perks highlighted that for WSCC Public Rights of Way service, working with volunteers would require a significant

culture change. To assist in the development and support of the volunteers, it was proposed that a volunteer co-ordinator would be appointed. It was also anticipated that there would be two more access rangers, the costs of which would be offset by a reduction in office posts. The Forum commended the proposals and congratulated the group's Chairman, Mr Acraman, noting that the views of members and other stakeholders appeared to have been considered and incorporated. It was however emphasised that it would be important for WSCC to very quickly establish and adapt to the new way of working in order to avoid allowing a window of neglect when neither the SDJC nor WSCC were providing a sufficient service.

### **South Downs National Park progress report**

68. The Forum received a verbal update from Liz Ballard, Interim Head of Strategy & Partnerships, South Downs National Park Authority on the development of the South Downs National Park. Ms Ballard explained that the National Park Authority (NPA) was mid-way through its preparatory year and work had been taking place to establish structures and ways of working. The planning process had been agreed in principle, which outlined that the Districts and Boroughs would have responsibility for the consideration of minor planning applications delegated to them while the NPA would consider major applications. Other policies would be developed by the NPA in the coming year, including a new Management Plan for the South Downs. It was hoped that the development of the Management Plan would involve as many stakeholders as possible and the NPA was in the process of considering how best to achieve this.

69. Ms Ballard also informed the Forum that the NPA would be the statutory authority responsible for areas of open access and would take a lead on the promotion of access. Consequently an Access and Rights of Way Officer had been appointed and was expected to start before Christmas. A key responsibility of the post would be to lead on the establishment of the South Downs Local Access Forum, which would be the statutory local access forum (LAF) for the South Downs. It was hoped that members of the new forum would begin to be recruited before the end of the year. In preparation for the new forum, Ms Ballard explained that the NPA was seeking to learn from the experience of the four existing LAFs in the South Downs and invited comments on what made for an effective forum and how the relationship between the LAFs was expected to be defined. The Forum considered it important that relations with the four existing forums be clarified at an early date and that a meeting with the chairmen would be useful.

70. The Forum discussed working arrangements and the policy framework that would exist once the NPA became fully operational. Ms Ballard confirmed that the NPA would ensure knowledge of the rights of way network through use of Parish Path Volunteers and by sharing knowledge with the highways authorities in a coordinated inspection programme that avoided duplication. It was also noted that the NPA would work closely with the highways authorities so that its work would add value to that of the local authority. For example the National Park Management Plan would complement the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) and the Local Transport Plans (LTPs). As the authority responsible for maintenance of the rights of way, the County Council would lead on most projects; however the NPA would be responsible for enhancement and as such

could lead on projects that the County Council did not prioritise. The NPA would also be developing an Access and Recreation Policy that would give long-term clarity.

### **Rights of Way Improvement Plans and the Sub Forums**

71. The Forum received the unconfirmed minutes of the Coastal Plain Sub Forum and verbal reports on the Low Weald and High Weald Sub Forums. Members noted that the Coastal Plain Sub Forum was continuing work on the development of the Manhood Greenway Project, while the two other sub forums had not met since the previous Forum meeting. The Chairmen of the Low and High Weald Sub Forums reported that further meetings had not been arranged as there had been very little progress on the implementation of the RoWIP priority projects and it had consequently become difficult to motivate the Sub Forum members.

72. The Forum Officer apologised for limited work on the identified projects but explained that the Access Rangers had a large workload and that maintenance of rights of way remained their priority. The Forum agreed that the priority projects should be pursued when opportunities arose, but accepted that WSCC would not be able to actively pursue them in the near future. It was therefore agreed that the sub forums should only meet if there was sufficient business. The future viability of the Sub Forums was also discussed and it was recognised that the reasons for their establishment (such as inputting into the RoWIP) had largely been achieved. It was also noted that when the South Downs Local Access Forum was created it would be necessary to review CAFWS and its Sub Forums, including membership. In the meantime the Forum Officer agreed to write to the Sub Forum Chairmen outlining what they could expect in WSCC support. Members voiced their concern at the level of support being provided and emphasised that in order for the Forum to operate effectively and to produce added value it required sufficient support from WSCC officers.

**Action: Jane Noble**

### **Current/future strategic developments**

#### *Kilnwood Vale (west of Bewbush development)*

73. The Forum received a verbal update from Tricia Butcher on the Kilnwood Vale development. Members noted that the developer, Crest Nicholson, had submitted an outline planning application for the site which included the detailed application for the first phase of the development. The application included a Pegasus crossing that would allow users of the bridleway to safely cross the dual carriageway road.

### **Current/future consultations**

74. The Forum Officer gave a verbal report on the Local Transport Plan 3 which was being developed by West Sussex County Council. The latest draft was a much more streamlined document that outlined the long term strategy in West Sussex. The Forum agreed that the Forum Officer should continue to seek members' views to feed into the development process. Members also noted that further information on the LTP3 had been circulated and that comments on the content should be forwarded to the Forum Officer as soon as possible. The Forum

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

also noted the correspondence sent to Defra in response to its consultation 'An invitation to shape the Nature of England' (copy appended to the signed minutes).

75. The Forum also considered a response to the Sussex Wildlife Trust's consultation on proposals to fence and graze parts of Ebernoe Common. It was agreed that a CAFWS response should be sent outlining that while generally supportive of the proposals; the Forum would wish to see appropriate access facilitated on the existing G Road and suggesting that designating the G Road as a Restricted Byway would be preferable.

**Action: Jane Noble**

### **Forestry Commission Access Group**

76. The Vice Chairman reported that the letter highlighting the access opportunities for Eartham Wood discussed at the previous meeting had not yet been sent but a draft had been prepared. It was highlighted that like all public bodies, the Forestry Commission was seeking to reduce spending and that as such, improvements might be hard to secure. It was however agreed that the letter should still be sent as soon as possible.

**Action: Glynn Jones / Jane Noble**

### **General Report**

77. The Forum received the General Report (copy appended to the signed minutes) which included items of interest to the Forum, including:

- South East LAF Chairmen's meeting
- Local Access Forum conference, February 2011
- Forestry Commission land sales
- Defra's 'Invitation to shape the Nature of England' consultation
- Chichester District Council's consultation on Dog Control Orders
- A23 Handcross to Warninglid improvements
- Rights of Way Committee meeting, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2010
- Defra guidance to Local Authorities on stiles and gates
- Permissive Access provided through Defra Stewardship Scheme
- Pathwatch
- Coastal Access project
- Natural England consultation on making representations and objections regarding coastal access proposals
- Neighbouring LAFs

78. With regard to the information on the Government's proposals to reduce the public ownership of the forestry estate, it was agreed that CAFWS should write to the Forestry Commission to highlight its concerns that private ownership could reduce access opportunities, in particular access on bike, horse or by carriage.

**Action: Jane Noble**

### **Agenda items for future meetings of the Forum**

79. It was agreed that future meetings of the Forum should consider:

- WSCC Public Rights of Way Review progress report

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

- CAFWS post-2011 and the establishment of the South Downs Local Access Forum
- Network Rail and public rights of way crossings of railways
- Rights of Way Improvement Plan

### **Dates of future meetings**

80. It was agreed that future meetings of the Forum would take place either County Hall, Chichester or at County Hall North, Horsham on the following dates:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 at County Hall North, Horsham
- 13<sup>th</sup> April 2011
- 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011
- 16<sup>th</sup> November 2011
- 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012

The meeting closed at 1:15pm

**The Chairman**