

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at Church Farm, Coombes on 15th July 2009.

Present:

	Mr Peter Brown (Chairman)	
Mrs Helen Baldwin	Mr Chris Boocock	Mrs Heidi Brunsdon
Mrs Tricia Butcher	Mr Dave Evans	Mrs Ann Janes
Mr Glynn Jones (V/C)	Mr Trevor Passmore	Mr Martin Reynolds
Mr David Ribbens	Mr Nigel Sloan	Mrs Sue Strudwick
Mr Peter Tompkins	Mr Alan White	Mr David Whyberd
Mrs Shirley Wright		

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Officers: Craig Bowdery, Lisa Creaye-Griffin and Jane Noble. Jeremy Burgess from the South Downs Joint Committee was also present.

Apologies and welcome to new member

32. Apologies were received from Phil Belden and Bill Acraman. The Chairman also welcomed the Forum's newest member, Heidi Brunsdon, to her first meeting. Heidi explained that she was a newly elected County Councillor from East Grinstead and was a keen equestrian. She also sat on the WSCC's Rights of Way Committee and CAFWS's High Weald Sub Forum, as well as on Mid Sussex District Council and East Grinstead Town Council.

Declaration of interests

33. Heidi Brunsdon declared a personal interest with regard to item 13iii (CAFWS response to the consultation regarding Mid Sussex District Council's assessment of PPG17) as she was a member of Mid Sussex District Council.

Minutes of the last meeting

34. Resolved –
That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on 8th April 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Actions and matters arising not covered by the agenda

35. With reference to minute 6, Glynn Jones tabled a report on the work of the **website working group** (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report detailed how the working group was proposing to create a new CAFWS web presence that would not be hosted by the County Council's website in order to emphasise CAFWS's independence. The site would feature a series of routes for walkers, cyclists and equestrians that would be downloaded in a pdf format and help to encourage people to enjoy the countryside safely and responsibly. Glynn explained that he viewed the downloadable routes as the next step for the user that wanted to move on from guided walks, but were not confident enough to create their own route. Members were broadly supportive of the Working Group's suggestions, and agreed that the profile of CAFWS needed to be supported by a series of press releases highlighting the Forum's work and achievements. Members discussed the practical implications of the website proposal, and noted that the current CAFWS web pages were part of the County Council's website. Therefore the

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting
development of a new website would require CAFWS to bid for additional time and resources.

36. Following the discussion reported in minute 7, the Chairman reported that the **Forestry Commission** had launched a consultation on the long term role of the public forest estate. It was felt that as access issues were prevalent in the consultation document, CAFWS should formally respond to it. It was agreed that a small group of members would meet to consider a response, which would then be circulated to the Forum for comments. The group would be:

- Glynn Jones
- Helen Baldwin
- Tricia Butcher
- Chris Boocock
- Nigel Sloan

(The consultation document is available on the Forestry Commission's website at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy> and the deadline for responses is 28th September 2009)

Action: GJ, HB, TB, CB and NS to meet and consider response

37. The Chairman requested that the **cycling working group** (minute 15) meet at the end of the meeting to arrange a date for their next meeting and to confirm their Chairman and membership. Ann Janes reported that she was standing down from the group.

38. The Chairman invited Tricia Butcher to give an update on her communication with the National Trust regarding the **Woolbeeding Estate** (minute 30). Tricia reported that she had attended a meeting with the Estate's new manager, who informed her that the Estate's staff were now treating the area as if it were open access land. They were not however keen on the idea of dedicating any new rights of way, as they preferred to retain the option to close paths occasionally to 'rest' them if overused. Members noted that this approach left a gap in the statutory rights of way network and also made it difficult to plan routes in the area as none of the paths in the Woolbeeding Estate would appear on maps. It was agreed that Glynn Jones would continue to pursue the matter through the South Downs Joint Committee.

Action: Glynn Jones

39. Following the **parish council workshop** hosted by CAFWS after the previous meeting, the Chairman presented a draft copy of CAFWS's 'Newsletter to Parish Councils' (copy appended to the signed minutes). Members welcomed the production of a newsletter and the intention of working closer with parishes. Chris Boocock suggested that it would be useful to include that parishes might like to request facilities such as cycle parking in the 'What are your needs?' paragraph. Members also discussed how the newsletter might be distributed, and requested that additional copies be available to all members who requested them so that they could be distributed at parish meetings.

Action: Jane Noble to finalise newsletter. Craig Bowdery to distribute.

Urgent matters

40. There were none.

Recent guidance on Local Access Forums from the Secretary of State

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

41. Members noted a letter from Defra sent to all Local Access Forums outlining the changes made to the Secretary of State's guidance for LAFs in England (copy appended to the signed minutes). Members also noted a letter from Hew Irranca-Davies MP recognising the importance of LAFs and their work (copy appended to the signed minutes).

West Sussex Rights of Way Committee

42. Jane Noble gave a verbal report on the 14th July 2009 Rights of Way Committee meeting. Jane outlined that approval had been given to the diversion/creation of new footpaths and bridleways at Warnham, East Grinstead, Colgate, Worthing and Warningcamp. Members were also informed that following a public inquiry, the Secretary of State had approved the addition of a footpath in and Eastergate. Helen Baldwin highlighted that that the addition to the Definitive Map of the bridleway at Warningcamp would be at the expense of a G road, which could be used by carriage drivers. She hoped this would not create a precedent as many G roads were vital links in the rights of way network. Tricia Butcher explained that she had been informed that all G roads would be considered individually before any decisions were taken on their future.

43. Jane also updated members on the second Pitshill public inquiry. The landowner had altered his plans slightly by planting trees and had stated that he would only restore the house if the path diversion was approved. He had also used a horse rider and horse to demonstrate that the proposed bridleway was not too steep for equestrian use, although members of the Forum questioned whether the path was really suitable for anyone other than advanced riders. Jane explained that despite WSCC's objections it looked as though the diversion order would be approved, but that by objecting WSCC had secured some positive alterations to the scheme. Alan White expressed his disappointment that the same inspectors were used for the second inquiry as the first, and also paid tribute to the efforts of Jon Perks while under examination during the inquiry.

44. Alan White also raised his disappointment regarding the Sedgewick Park public inquiry, and the decision of Henry Smith, West Sussex County Council Leader, to write a personal letter questioning the need for a second public inquiry. Members felt that even though the letter was written in Henry Smith's capacity as a private friend of the landowner, the letter in the press undermined the position of the Rights of Way Committee and went against the recommendations of officers. It was agreed that the Chairman would write to Bill Acraman to express CAFWS's concern at the Leader's unclear role in the inquiry.

Action: Peter Brown

South Downs National Park: progress report

45. Lisa Creaye-Griffin gave a verbal report to update members on the creation of the South Downs National Park, and the National Park Authority (NPA). The NPA was expected to be set up by April 2010 but it would not have all of its powers until April 2011. The National Park was due to be formally designated soon but before this there was likely to be a short public inquiry to consider the additional areas added to the proposed boundary. *(Since the meeting it has been confirmed that the inquiry will take place on 18th August 2009 for 1-2 days at The Chatsworth Hotel, Worthing)* Defra would also be launching a consultation on the membership and composition of the NPA. Defra were suggesting that the membership should be between 29 and 37 members and that, depending upon the overall size, there should be from 15 to 19 local authority members; from 8 to 10 national members;

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting and from 6 to 8 parish members. *(Full details on the consultation can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/south-downs-membership/index.htm>)*

46. Lisa also reported that Dr Richard Shaw had been appointed as the Interim Chief Executive for the NPA. Dr Shaw would be in post for one year only and was beginning to appoint a team to assist in the development of the NPA. Lisa confirmed that the South Downs would have its own local access forum and that the four highways authorities (East and West Sussex, Hampshire and Brighton & Hove) would be considering working arrangements. The highways authorities would also retain their current responsibilities, including the production of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Members were also informed that WSCC was looking at how WSCC's work could align better with that of the National Park. For example staff at WSCC were inspecting all rights of way on a nine month basis, but the paths within the South Downs were inspected on a 12 month cycle.

47. Members asked how planning and development control would be affected by the creation of the NPA. Lisa explained that the NPA would become the planning authority, but that one possibility was that it would then delegate a lot of the functions back to the districts and boroughs. As an issue of significant concern, it was expected that there would soon be a report paper issued by Defra to outline what the options for planning and development control would be. Trevor Passmore asked who would be the access authority, and suggested that the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority was not the access authority for the area it covered. Members were informed that there was a wide variety of different models to follow when setting up a NPA, and that in the Brecon Beacons the local circumstances and needs would have been considered to create an authority that was suitable for that area as will be the case for the South Downs.

48. The Forum enquired how the responsibility for rights of way maintenance and the LAF's advisory role would be affected. Lisa explained that it was possible that WSCC would be responsible for the maintenance of rights of way on the South Downs, with the South Downs LAF advising its work rather than CAFWS. Members felt that this was not a desirable arrangement, but noted that precise working arrangements had not been agreed. The Forum agreed that CAFWS should be fully consulted on any changes before they were made, and Lisa Creaye-Griffin undertook to ensure this took place.

Action: Lisa Creaye-Griffin

Rights of way and countryside access general report for the South Downs

49. Jeremy Burgess, the South Downs Joint Committee's Central Area Manager, gave a presentation to update members on the work of the SDJC (copy appended to the signed minutes).

50. Members asked whether the SDJC's inspection of rights of way included an assessment of whether stiles were appropriate or restrictive to access. Jeremy explained that the inspections looked at the condition and safety of a path's structures, but that one of the priorities of the area teams was to look at ways of making access easier for all. The SDJC would also only replace a stile with a gap or a gate if all parties (SDJC, WSCC and the landowner) agreed it was necessary and would improve access. It was also noted that across the South Downs there was an extremely large rights of way network (2,300km in East and West Sussex alone), and that it would take time and considerable expense to replace all stiles. Trevor Passmore commented that many landowners were actually against gates as they were often left open or of poor quality and not custom built for the path. Therefore

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting
a gate could become difficult to open and close and become an expensive obstruction to a right of way.

51. Members also asked whether the Pathwatch scheme was in operation in the Horsham district. Jeremy explained that it was not yet in Horsham and that the scheme originated as a trial project in the Chichester district. The extension of the scheme into other areas has depended upon Police enthusiasm and the availability of resources for both the Police and the SDJC. Jeremy undertook to investigate the issue to see if Pathwatch could be extended into Horsham.

52. Jeremy also confirmed that the SDJC would not be able to carry out all of their current responsibilities without the assistance of the volunteers. The volunteers were able to utilise their local knowledge to work with enthusiasm to enable a large number of work days and projects to be delivered. Alan White stated that he felt WSCC should follow the SDJC's lead and work closer with volunteers. The Chairman noted that he wanted to see more countryside volunteers across the county, and that CAFWS's efforts to work closer with parish councils would complement this.

CAFWS two year progress report

53. Members received a report from the Chairman outlining the work of CAFWS during the preceding two years (copy appended to the signed minutes).

54. Heidi Brunsdon raised her concern at the resurfacing of some paths using materials that made it more dangerous for equestrian users. Tricia Butcher explained that in her experience, the problems arose when landowners carried out resurfacing work without consulting WSCC. David Ribbens also highlighted the importance of a smooth surface for wheelchair users. The Chairman undertook to relay the concerns to the Rights of Way team at WSCC to ensure staff were aware that the safety of a path's surface is as important as the path being clear of vegetation.

Action: Peter Brown / Jane Noble

55. Members discussed the wording of the report and questioned the use of the word 'unfairly' in the reporting of the Forestry Commission's policy on equestrian access. It was agreed that the word was too pejorative and should be removed as it did not add meaning to the sentence.

56. Chris Boocock asked whether a consideration of the implications of the Community Infrastructure Levy could be included in the 'Looking ahead' section of the report. Chris explained that under the new proposals, developer contributions would not be designated for specific projects. For example, CAFWS could lobby to request that a certain percentage of developer contributions be ring-fenced for access projects. Chris also suggested that CAFWS should proactively seek to work directly with developers in the same way parish councils were now being involved.

Sub Forums

57. Resolved –
That the Terms of Reference for the Coastal Plain, Low Weald and High Weald Sub Forums of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex be approved and circulated to all Sub Forum members.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

58. Members noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Low Weald Sub Forum's meeting on 1st July 2009, and the unconfirmed minutes of the Coastal Plain Sub Forum's meeting on 28th May 2009. Alan White asked if the outcome of a public inquiry at Clymping beach was known and Chris Boocock explained that the issue had been resolved so that there would be a path across the beach that didn't impact on the natural habitats. Members recognised that coastal defence issues often made access improvements more complicated and it was agreed that the Coastal Plain Sub Forum could respond to Arun District Council's Coastal Defence Strategy consultation.

Current/future consultations

59. Tricia Butcher updated the Forum on the public inquiry regarding the A23 Handcross to Warninglid Widening Scheme. Tricia attended the inquiry on behalf of CAFWS to raise concerns that the proposed track alongside the road would not be safe for walkers, cyclists or equestrians due to an insufficient barrier. The Highways Agency had now agreed to move the safety fence to improve safety, but Tricia felt that this would still not be good enough for equestrians. Chris Boocock also attended the inquiry, and he expressed his disappointment that a public body such as the Highways Agency should be so reluctant to address the needs of all user groups. Tricia and Chris also voiced their concern that despite meeting with WSCC Officers prior to the inquiry and thinking that they had their support, CAFWS's views were opposed by the WSCC Highways Engineers. Members noted that it seemed as if WSCC officers in this instance were working against the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and it was agreed that the Chairman should write to Bill Acraman to see if he had an explanation.

Action: Peter Brown

60. Members also noted the CAFWS response to the consultation regarding Chichester College's Brinsbury Campus Planning Application ref DC/08/2598 (copy appended to the signed minutes).

Current/future consultations

61. Members were asked to consider a response to the consultation regarding a reassessment of an existing restriction to the Open Access land at Sidehill, south-east of Findon. Natural England was seeking views on restricting access to the land when there was a dairy bull present in the field. Members felt that CAFWS should use the opportunity to raise their concerns that the Open Access land had no access provided and as such was not able to be easily accessed. Jane Noble undertook to prepare a response to the consultation stating that CAFWS would not object to renewing the restriction of access whilst the bull was present, but that this was only on the provision that the land be opened up to users the rest of the time.

Action: Jane Noble

62. The Forum also considered a response to the Department for Transport's Road Safety consultation. Members agreed that the consultation document did not give sufficient consideration to the non-vehicular users of rural roads, or to the importance of rural roads to countryside access. Members also felt that more needed to be done to reduce the speed of traffic on rural roads and the number of heavy goods vehicles using rural routes. The Chairman also highlighted the importance of ensuring roadside verges were maintained to ensure pedestrians could safely walk alongside a road.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting

63. Members also noted the responses sent on behalf of CAFWS to the Department for Transport's consultation on the Local Transport Plan 3 Guidance and to West Sussex County Council's consultation on the Minerals & Waste Core Strategy Development Plan Document (copies appended to the signed minutes).

General Report

64. Members noted the General Report from the Forum Officer (copy appended to the signed minutes). The General Report included updates on the following areas:

- Recognition of the good work of Local Access Forums by Hew Irranca-Davies MP
- Open Access Land – consultation regarding land at Sullington Hill
- Improving access to the English coast
- Rights of Way Committee meeting, 14th July 2009
- South Downs National Park
- South Downs Way
- South East Plan
- Re-registration of Common Land
- Sussex Pathwatch meeting, 25th June 2009
- Promoting access
- England Access Forum meeting, 30th June 2009
- Neighbouring local access forums

65. Helen Baldwin also reported that the Sussex Pathwatch meeting had tested vehicle counters to monitor if paths were being used illegally. The tests had found that a pony cart was being recognised as a car, and as such work was being done to fine tune the system.

Agenda items for the next meeting of the Forum

66. It was agreed that a discussion on the A27 and dangerous highways crossing would take place, and Chris Boocock undertook to invite representatives from the Highways Agency to attend. Members also noted that the next meeting would feature a presentation on the work of the High Weald AONB.

Action: Chris Boocock

Matters for information

67. Tricia Butcher highlighted that Horsham District Council had recently completed and published their Sustainable Community Strategy, and that it included multiple references to increasing access provision and support for WSCC's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Members asked why it was the RoWIP was not on the agenda for discussion and review, and Jane Noble explained that her role at WSCC has altered and that as a result she had not had the time to prepare a report. Lisa Creaye-Griffin highlighted that WSCC currently had a recruitment freeze and that she was therefore unable to recruit assistance for Jane. However Lisa was planning on advertising for some part-time volunteer support and she invited members to let her know if they knew of anyone who may be interested.

Date of next meeting

68. Members noted that the next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex would take place on Wednesday 28th October 2009 at 10:15am at

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next Forum meeting
County Hall North, Horsham. The subsequent meeting would be on 27th January
2010 at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting closed at 1:09pm.

The Chairman