

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 The Grange Leisure Centre, Midhurst on 29th January 2009.

Present:	Mr Peter Brown (Chairman)	
Mr Bill Acraman	Mrs Helen Baldwin	Mr Phil Belden
Mr Chris Boocock	Mrs Tricia Butcher	Mr Dave Evans
Mrs Ann Janes	Mr Martin Reynolds	Mr David Ribbens
Mr Nigel Sloan	Mrs Sue Strudwick	Mr Peter Tompkins
Mr Alan White	Mrs Shirley Wright	

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Officers: Craig Bowdery, Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Christine Luff and Jane Noble.

Also present were Nicky Horter (Chichester Harbour Conservancy) and James Ort (South Downs Access Forum)

Apologies were received from Derek Deedman, Glynn Jones, Trevor Passmore, Ronnie Perrin and David Whyberd.

Welcome

142. The Chairman welcomed those present, including Martin Reynolds who was attending his first meeting as a Forum member. Martin introduced himself to the Forum and explained that he had spent many years working in West Sussex as a building surveyor, and that his other interests included shooting and fishing.

Declarations of interest

143. There were none.

Minutes of the last meeting

144. Resolved –
That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting on 29th October 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

145. With reference to minute 109 and the proposed diversion of a footpath at Pitshill, Christine Luff gave members an update on the situation. Chichester District Council had made further Orders to divert the footpath and bridleway, and West Sussex County Council had formally objected again. It was therefore almost inevitable that there would be another public inquiry.

146. Following the discussion of the CAFWS website documented in minute 122, the Chairman informed the Forum that it was proposed to form a small working group to investigate the possibilities of a stand-alone CAFWS website that wasn't hosted by the County Council. The Chairman asked for any interested members to join Glynn Jones and Craig Bowdery to form a working group to consider what

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form the website should take and possible content. Peter Tompkins volunteered and other members supported this.

147. Resolved –

That Glynn Jones, Peter Tompkins and Craig Bowdery form a working group to investigate options for a CAFWS website.

148. Jane Noble informed members that following her undertaking to do so at the previous meeting (minute 134), a map showing the boundary of the High Weald AONB, as well as the other AONBs and Countryside Management Areas, had been circulated to all members at the meeting. The Chairman also requested that the map be sent to those members who were unable to make the meeting.

149. Following from the recommendation made in minute 114 that the barbs on barbed wire fences should point away from the path, Sue Strudwick informed members that there was no such wire produced with barbs only on one side. It was explained that landowners should try to put the wire on the side of the post furthest away from the path, and to exercise general care and consideration when using barbed wire.

150. Chris Boocock informed members that Southern Rail was working with the South Downs Society to offer schools and youth groups free rail travel to enable them to go for walks in the South Downs AONB. Full details can be found at http://www.southernrailway.com/main.php?page_id=622 (scroll to the bottom of the page).

Urgent matters

151. Tricia Butcher informed the Forum that the Highways Agency was currently consulting on a widening scheme for the A23 between Handcross and Warninglid. CAFWS had not been included in the consultation, and it was felt that opportunities to achieve best value for as many users as possible had not been fully explored. Tricia, working with Chris Boocock, had approached the County Council's Highways department seeking their support for some alterations to the plans, but they were informed that this would not be possible.

152. Tricia Butcher explained that she was not opposed to the scheme itself, but that with a relatively small amount of work and expenditure, the scheme could benefit even more people. Tricia explained that an existing bridleway led out to a slip road. By creating a short path on the wide verge of this slip road a safe off-road link could be created for all users. The verge was owned by WSCC, who were planning to give the land to the Highways Agency, and as such Tricia suggested WSCC should consider creating the path on the verge rather than dismissing any new proposals. The planned height of the tunnel would make it usable by cyclists and dismounted equestrians. Therefore if an eastern link could be created, which early indications suggested could be feasible, the tunnel would be able to benefit more users.

153. Members supported these suggestions and requested that a letter be sent from the Forum to the Highways Agency highlighting the opportunity presented by the scheme. Members noted that the Highways Agency had been cooperative during previous consultations by agreeing to implement a tunnel, so there was potential to work with them to improve the scheme for the A23. It was also agreed that WSCC's Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport be

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invited to attend a future meeting of CAFWS to discuss how the Forum is involved in consultations of this kind.

154. Helen Baldwin raised her concern at a locked gate on a G road near her home. It was recommended that Helen contact her local WSCC Highways office, which was in Drayton. In response to a question, Helen informed the Forum that she had approached the landowner already but that they had proven to be non-cooperative. Phil Belden highlighted that in each instance of this kind, it was important to consider the individual circumstances to reach a conclusion that was acceptable for both landowners and users.

Working groups

155. David Ribbens requested that an update report on the work and progress of the disabled users working group be provided for the next meeting, and asked whether there was a need for it to be reformed. Jane Noble undertook to provide updates as appropriate and assured members that work was continuing and that opportunities to improve access for disabled users were not being missed.

156. The Forum received a written update report on the first meeting of Reviewing Promotion of Walking in West Sussex Working Group. Phil Belden suggested that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on increasing the diversity of participation. It was suggested that the figures for those attending walks should also be reviewed to ensure that the total number taking part was accurate and was not including the same people several times. Members asked about WSCC's guided walks programme, and Lisa Creaye-Griffin explained that the co-ordinating of the programme and the booklet was paid for by WSCC and put together by a private company on the County Council's behalf.

Sub Forums

Coastal Plain Sub Forum

157. Helen Baldwin updated the Forum on the work of the Coastal Plain Sub Forum, which included looking at the progress made in the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). The sub forum felt that whilst there were many cycle routes, there was comparatively little provision for horse riders on the Coastal Plain, although it was recognised that this would take time to develop as there has historically been very little equestrian provision in the area. Helen also informed the members that there was a small group noting the locations of livery yards and their proximity to useable routes. It was noted that the presence of livery yards has a positive impact on the local economy. It was therefore suggested that it might be appropriate to apply for funding through the LEADER scheme.

Low Weald Sub Forum

158. The Chairman informed the Forum that Dave Evans had resigned as Chairman of the sub forum, and that the sub forum's Secretary and Alan White had also resigned. Jane Noble updated the Forum on the previous meeting of the sub forum, and the useful dialogue that took place between the members and the local access rangers. Discussions included the RoWIP and the recognition that progress had been made, but that more was needed. It was also noted that there was a need to identify specific projects for the rangers to focus on. Jane

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also invited members from the Low Weald area to join the sub forum, and it was suggested by members that the sub forum could merge with the High Weald Sub Forum. It was however agreed that merging the Low Weald and the High Weald would result in the sub forum covering an area that was too large to manage.

High Weald Sub Forum

159. Tricia Butcher reported on the recent meetings of the High Weald Sub Forum. At the September meeting, members were asked to collate all of the project proposals that had been submitted for the area and reassess their viability and then prioritise. The sub forum had collated around half of the projects and would complete the process as soon as possible. It was however argued that before the projects could be reassessed and prioritised they had to be collected into one single, definitive list. Some members suggested that only once such a list was complete could each project be assessed and evaluated and that it was not practical to collate and assess simultaneously. Tricia explained that at the beginning of the work on the RoWIP members were asked to be aspirational in their suggestions, which resulted in many ideas being submitted that were clearly not feasible. As such, it was argued that there was little point in including them in a list and spending time considering them. Jane Noble stated that she found the meetings to be very useful and that the development of the list was now a priority for her. Jane also paid testament to the input of local members and thanked them for contributing with their knowledge of the area.

160. Bill Acraman informed the Forum that he had now drawn together a list of all G roads in the county. There were around 40 of them, although there were none in the north of West Sussex. Bill explained that G roads were roads that the Local Authority was responsible for maintaining but was often unable to do so, due to the roads' size and limited use compared to other roads. They were usually little more than tracks or wide footpaths. Some of the G roads were in good condition, while others needed a lot of work to make them usable. Due to their limited budget, maintaining the G roads was relatively low on the priorities of the County Council's Highway department, and as such Bill suggested that responsibility for maintaining them should move to the Rights of Way team. Lisa Creaye-Griffin recognised that such a move would have some positive benefits, and also highlighted that Jane Noble was now the line manager for all of the Access Rangers and that as such there would be a much closer link.

161. Dave Evans queried whether a road in Hurstpierpoint was a G road. The road was between College Lane and Hassocks Road near St George's Lane. Bill Acraman advised Dave to seek clarification from WSCC's Rights of Way Committee, and Jane Noble undertook to also investigate. Helen Baldwin also stated that her riding club had compiled a report on G roads in the area, which had been submitted to WSCC around 15 years ago. Bill requested that a copy of this report be sent to him.

South Downs Access Forum

162. James Ort reported on the work of the South Downs Access Forum (SDAF), which included a successful and well attended workshop in November 2009. The workshop looked at the four RoWIPs/Countryside Access Plans (CAPs) that spanned the South Downs, and the attendees had made some useful recommendations that James was incorporating into a written report. The document would help to advise local authorities with how to ensure consistent

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implementation of each plan for the benefit of the whole South Downs landscape. The SDAF had also been making progress on developing a series of seven downloadable maps that promoted increased use of some of the South Downs' key open access areas. The maps would show entry points to the sites (i.e. gates and stile locations), as well as provide a code of conduct and information about each area. SDAF had also hoped to get involved in Natural England's Diversity Forum and was due to undertake an audit of South Downs-based car parks shortly. The Chairman thanked James for his work and that of the sub forum, and noted that the South Downs already had a good network of rights of way, and that the SDAF should perhaps focus on promotion and encouraging use.

163. Nigel Sloan highlighted that there existed a need for landowner cooperation when creating or upgrading rights of way, and asked what the County Council were able to do to encourage cooperation. It was explained that WSCC would negotiate with landowners to gain support from the landowner for the improvements and that in addition it has the power to create footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways by creation order, under section 26 of the Highways Act 1980. There was no dedicated fund for such negotiations, but through positive engagement with landowners, there was potential to pay for costs such as for required fencing, gates or surfacing. Each case was treated differently with the specific circumstances being considered. Nigel also raised the issue of landowners blocking access to some parcels of open access land defined in the CRoW Act, and suggested that this should be something that CAFWS discusses at a future meeting. The Chairman agreed and stated that it would be covered in either WSCC's Annual Report, or the Annual Report from the South Downs Joint Committee.

164. Dave Evans asked whether it was known when the Secretary of State's decision regarding the proposed South Downs National Park would be made. Phil Belden explained that this was very uncertain but that he would guess late spring or early summer. It was however noted that there were County Council elections in June, and that this would affect the timing of an announcement in so much as it was unlikely to be made during the election period.

Draft CAFWS Position Statement for potential future developments

165. The Chairman presented a draft Position Statement that outlined CAFWS' concerns and views towards new developments (copy appended to the signed minutes). It was proposed that members' comments be incorporated into the draft, and that the Position Statement be used to form the basis of CAFWS' responses to consultations on developments. Members' comments included:

- The Statement should not just refer to rights of way, but should also consider the minor roads that are used to link routes
- CAFWS' priority was not just maintaining the public rights of way, but to enhance all aspects of access and accessibility
- Mention should be made to include a commitment to sustainable access
- Use of the countryside and the benefits for health and social diversity should also be emphasised as there might be funding available to CAFWS if these were stated aims
- The draft statement was oriented towards housing developments, and was less applicable to other developments such as road schemes
- The role of CAFWS as an expert body should be emphasised as it included local people from a wide range of backgrounds who could offer developers in depth knowledge

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The Chairman thanked members for their comments, and asked members to email him if they had anything further to add. It was agreed that the Position Statement would be re-drafted to include comments made, and circulated to members before the next meeting.

Current Strategic Developments

166. Nigel Sloan reported that a letter he sent as a member of CAFWS to the West Sussex County Times had been published. In the letter he objected to the **West of Horsham Design Principles** and urged people to recognise the value of the countryside in the area. Tricia Butcher asked if CAFWS had responded to planning applications in Horsham from Countryside Properties which appeared to conflict with the West of Horsham Masterplan. Jane Noble explained that CAFWS had not responded and that she thought the deadline had passed, and she undertook to investigate the issue and to prepare a response as required. *(Since the meeting it has been confirmed that the deadlines for comment on the two planning applications were 22nd December 2008 for application reference DC/08/2447, and 24th December 2008 for application reference DC/08/2446. The applications were for outline planning permission and there will be a full planning application submitted in due course.)*

167. Tricia Butcher updated the Forum on the Examination in Public of the **West of Bewbush Joint Area Action Plan**. Tricia reported that she and Chris Boocock had attended two sessions with the Inspector, with the aim of securing a dedicated, traffic-free, bridleway bridge on the eastern side of the development, to replace the present at-grade level crossing of the railway. Horsham District Council and the developers, Crest Nicholson, had asserted that Network Rail wished to keep open the level crossing. However, Tricia and Chris contacted Network Rail's Level Crossing Risk Controller to outline the plans, and their concerns. The Risk Controller knew nothing of the proposals and stated that he was strongly opposed to keeping the level crossing open as to do so would put users a far greater risk. Tricia and Chris, on behalf of CAFWS, were therefore able to show the Inspector that Network Rail did not support the retention of the crossing with the production of an email advising that Network Rail would object to any proposal to keep the level crossing open. As a result of this, the Inspector asked CAFWS to produce an evidence base for the bridge, with estimated costs, in the following week. Horsham DC and Crest Nicholson were given two weeks to respond. Following this, the Inspector will decide on whether to recommend a dedicated bridleway bridge is added to the Masterplan.

Current/future consultations

Proposals to fence Marley Down – National Trust

168. Christine Luff informed the Forum that following CAFWS's response endorsing the National Trust's proposals to fence Marley Common, the Trust had now submitted an application to the Secretary of State. The objection period was due to end in the second week of February, and as such the outcome would be known soon thereafter.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan

169. Lisa Creaye-Griffin informed the Forum that the High Weald AONB Management Plan for 2008-2014 was under review. The period of consultation

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ended on October 18th 2008 and as such CAFWS (as well as WSCC, who were not informed of the consultation) had missed the opportunity to formally take part in it. WSCC were however being asked to adopt the new Management Plan and Lisa invited comments from members to be incorporated into a Cabinet Member report that she was preparing on the subject. The latest version of the Management Plan was available on the High Weald AONB's website within the papers for their Joint Advisory Committee meeting on 20th October 2008. (Available at: www.highweald.org/text.asp?PageId=375). Lisa informed the Forum that work towards improving access ran throughout the document, although she was slightly concerned at a possible threat to historic routes. Within the Management Plan were proposals to maintain and improve the long distance bridleways within the AONB, access opportunities for those with impaired mobility and further information on public transport links. Members also noted that it was hoped that a representative from the High Weald AONB would attend a future CAFWS meeting, possibly in October.

National Trails – Natural England

170. Members of the Forum noted the draft response to Natural England's consultation on National Trails (copy appended to the signed minutes). With regard to question 1c of the consultation document, which asked about the criteria that should be used to define the 'best' routes, members queried the priorities assigned to each criterion. Jane Noble explained that she had placed the ticks in the boxes based on an aggregate of members' responses so far, but that they could still be changed. It was agreed that the criterion 'available to all users (multi-use)' should be changed from a low to a medium priority. Phil Belden suggested that giving 'passes places to eat or drink' a medium priority could result in fewer paths being given National Trail status as this was not possible to achieve. Other members however felt that this was an important criterion and should stay as a medium priority. It was therefore agreed that it would remain a medium priority, but that a comment would be added to the response to indicate that CAFWS felt that routes should ideally feature places to eat or drink and that whilst this was not always possible, CAFWS would not want this to stop a route being designated a nationally recognised trail. Members also agreed that the first comment at the end of the consultation document should be modified to reflect CAFWS' independence. Therefore it was agreed that the comment should state that it was essential that the resources existed to maintain any new National Trails, and that the new routes should not take resources away from the maintenance of the rest of the rights of way network.

Access to Forestry Commission land

171. The Chairman presented a report written by Glynn Jones regarding access to Forestry Commission (FC) land (copy appended to the signed minutes). Following a presentation given by representatives from the FC at the July 2008 meeting of CAFWS, members had expressed continued concern over the policies of the FC in West Sussex. The report proposed that the matter be discussed at the South East Local Access Forum, with a view to then taking it to the England Access Forum to clarify FC policy at a national level. The Forum fully supported the recommendation and thanked Glynn for his work.

172. Resolved –

That CAFWS' representative on the South East Local Access Forum should table the issue of access to Forestry Commission land as an item for

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discussion at its next meeting on 3rd March 2009 with a view to eventually taking the matter to the England Access Forum so that it can clarify access policy with the FC at a national level.

Access to the English Coast

173. The Chairman informed members that Natural England representatives had visited West Sussex, and working with WSCC, Chichester Harbour Conservancy and Peter Brown, had carried out an audit of coastal access. Where an existing right of way was not present, they would suggest possible routes which would be fully considered at a later date. Work was progressing well and CAFWS would be kept informed of future developments. Coastal access was being considered in detail and there would be national site visits and assessments taking place between July and December 2009. There would then be consultation with organisations including Local Access Forums. It was anticipated that the Marine and Coastal Access Bill would become law in 2010. It was expected that there would then be a 10 year national implementation process with work in some areas being completed before others.

174. Members asked how it was proposed to maintain a coastal route when coastal paths encountered urban areas. It was explained that in such instances, a route would be found through the urban area that tried to keep as close to the coast as possible. Members also noted that instances needed to be identified at an early stage when the route would need to be multi-use to accommodate all user groups. It was also explained that the new route would be subject to similar rules as CroW open access land and that landowners would have this right of access imposed on them and would not, other than possibly in exceptional cases, receive any financial compensation.

Access and volunteer work around Chichester Harbour

175. Members received a presentation from Nicky Horter of the Chichester Harbour Conservancy. Chichester Harbour welcomed around 1.5million visitors each year and featured 92km of public rights of way, predominantly footpaths. Unlike the South Downs Joint Committee, the Chichester Harbour Conservancy did not have any delegated duties for rights of way maintenance but it still worked hard to improve access for users, a task which was greatly assisted by their volunteers. Recent work included the construction of paths designed for use by wheelchairs and the development of the Salterns Way which ran from the centre of Chichester down to West Wittering.

176. Members thanked Nicky for her presentation and asked about car parking in the AONB. Nicky explained that the Conservancy ran two car parks and that there were other public, private and informal car parks, all of which were shown in a map available on the Conservancy website (www.conservancy.co.uk) and in the *Harbour News and Guide*. It was however highlighted that visitors were being encouraged to access the Harbour by more sustainable means such as cycling. Nicky also explained that a new book had been produced which featured twenty walks that start and finish at public transport stops. Nigel Sloan asked whether it was known how the coastal route proposed in the Coastal Access Bill would navigate through Oldpark Wood to the north of Bosham Hoe. Nicky explained that this was an area of Ancient Woodland and a SSSI that would need to be considered carefully before a decision was made.

General Report

177. The Forum received the General Report from Jane Noble (copy appended to the signed minutes). With reference to paragraph two in the report, members were informed that they would be consulted by Natural England on proposed restrictions to an area of open access land near Sullington. Jane also explained that the signs to dissuade illegal use of vehicles on restricted byways referred to in paragraph seven had not yet been erected, but that she had been promised they soon would be. Members were also reminded of the importance of reporting instances of illegal motorised vehicle use of rights of way to the Sussex Police Pathwatch scheme on 0845 6070999. Jane explained that whilst the Pathwatch scheme was endorsed by all of Sussex Police, it very much depended on whether different areas were able to support it. It was therefore important to report all instances to give the Police an appreciation of where problems were worst so that resources could be allocated accordingly. Members were also reminded that there was an LAF Regional Conference on 3rd March 2009, to which they were all invited and that anyone interested in attending should contact the Forum Secretary.

Matters for information

178. Chris Boocock informed the Forum that East Sussex County Council was consulting on their Cycling Strategy and that if members wished to comment they had until 27th February 2009. Chris also reported that he had been in communication with the Highways Agency and their contractors InterRoute to seek to improve facilities at road crossings. A meeting had been arranged and members were urged to contact Chris if they wanted to input in any way.

179. Dave Evans asked if the CRoW Act allowed CAFWS to request that the flora and fauna that was adjacent to rights of way needed to be protected and enhanced. It was confirmed that this was possible and that the protection of flora and fauna would be included in the Position Statement for future developments, and that it would be covered in WSCC's Annual Report at the next meeting.

Agenda items for the next meeting of the Forum

180. Members noted that the following items would be discussed at the next meeting of CAFWS:

- The AGM and the election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman
- Parish Councils – their current and potential contributions to access
- WSCC Annual Report
- Terms of Reference for the sub forums
- Consultation on Open Access Land at Sullington

Date of next meeting

181. The Forum noted that the date of the next meeting was Wednesday 8th April 2009. Future meeting dates were agreed as:

- Wednesday 15th July 2009
- Wednesday 28th October 2009
- Wednesday 27th January 2010

Members also agreed that the earlier start time of 10am was advantageous as it allowed more time for discussion, but that it made it difficult to attend on time. It was therefore agreed that future meetings would start at 10:15am

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The meeting ended at 13:01.

The Chairman.