

Medmerry STAG – comments by Peter Brown on behalf of CAFWS (Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

04/09/09

Introductory Comments

CAFWS's overall objective is to improve public access to and through the countryside and, in earlier consultations, it expressed the need to maintain a link between the communities of Bracklesham and Selsey. This coastal route has come into sharper focus in view of Natural England's Coastal Access proposals under the Marine Bill. In the absence of a coastal defence scheme, the assumption would be to align the Coastal Route along the beach. The design of the managed realignment process must take this legislation into account – probably by a phased approach to coastal paths.

From the STAG meeting, there is clearly much local support for improved access – for local residents and visitors alike – and CAFWS would hope to achieve the following outcomes:

- A route along the coastline – or as close as is practicable
- Additional paths, including one along the line of the sea defence embankments, to supplement the existing footpath network
- Cycle routes providing utility links between communities and recreational routes linked to the highway network and holiday resorts
- New bridleways between the communities for recreational use, contributing to green tourism

Aims and Objectives

The scheme is trying to deliver two main objectives – a managed retreat of the coastline to a more stable alignment and a new area of intertidal habitat to replace land lost around the Solent. It has become clear that the intertidal area will not become fully tidal for many years, depending on a number of only partly understood factors. In view of this, it is suggested that some new routes can be provided on a temporary permissive basis: they will have to be withdrawn or “rolled back” at a later date.

In view of the benefits of a coastal route, the viability of bridging the breach for walkers and cyclists should be addressed. Even if thought to be extravagant, the assessment should be done to demonstrate problems of viability and sustainability.

Manhood Greenway Project

I introduced this proposal at the Medmerry STAG on 3rd September: several groups representing cyclists and equestrians on the Manhood seek to establish an improved network of paths to benefit riders, cyclists and walkers. The benefits would be environmental, safety and helping the local economy through green tourism and

other direct services. The Project is at an early stage, but it should quite soon be able to suggest specific new routes needed in the Medmerry area to complement the wider network, which is its aim.

Emergency Access

This seems a key ambition of some of the local communities and, by providing a track useable by emergency service, this would clearly also be potentially suitable for cyclists and horses. The route of such a link could be a factor in choosing an alignment of flood defences.

The Options

The primacy of the need to create as large an intertidal area as possible is disappointing from CAFWS's point of view in that a reasonably direct route linking Bracklesham and Selsey would be difficult to achieve. The following comments look at a) the damage the options do to the present network and b) suggest how access could be improved with sympathetic alignment.

Option A

- a) Remarkably, there are no public rights of way in the area to be enclosed and this option would not damage the existing network
- b) If all the green and blue embankments went in straight away, there would be the potential for a good bridleway/cycleway/emergency access from Selsey beach to the country lane near Easton Farm. Similarly a route could provide a north/south link to the Marsh Farm area – here, a spur to Earnley would be a useful maintenance route. Although, under this option, the eastern part of the EA landownership will not be affected, there is potential for new routes – particularly a link through to the Sidlesham area and Pagham Harbour.

Options B

In terms of access, the only comment is the importance of ensuring there is continuity of access from Selsey beach to the perimeter embankment.

Option C

- a) This option will affect two important well used paths – nos. 70 and 75 – which link Ham Farm to the beach and to Selsey Town, respectively. I would recommend that the land take is reduced and that the northern bank is aligned to the south of the small watercourse and close to the present FP 75. It would be advantageous if FP 70 could be retained, at least in the short term as it will give great views of the new intertidal areas.
- b) This option would provide the easiest way of providing an emergency access as it would only have to get as far as Ham Farm as, from there, there is a hard tarmac road to link into the highway network; ideally there would be a spur

into the local Selsey roads south of Warner Farm. Although the rest of the perimeter bank would not need to be of a high standard to carry emergency vehicles, it would be suitable and invaluable as a recreational route for all n.m.us. (non motorised users). Detailed routes need to be defined at a later stage.

Footnote

These comments are from a narrow point of view, but that makes the case no less important for the benefit of local people and visitors alike. CAFWS can draw on a wealth of experience in terms of designing and routing paths and tracks to minimise disturbance and damage to surfaces.