



# Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

## Annual Report

April 2006 - March 2007



It's been another busy year for the Forum. The main focus for this year has been the county's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The draft has been out for public consultation with a wide range of interested groups, organisations and individuals, and will be published by West Sussex County Council (WSCC) in the near future. The members feel this is a good "blue print" for the future improvements and maintenance of the rights of way and access network.

Guest speakers have given the Forum an insight into ways in which improvements for recreational access can be enhanced within the county. It has been encouraging to see members actively responding to various consultations within the Forum's remit.

Following the publication of the new Local Access Forum Regulations and accompanying Guidelines from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Forum is delighted at the number of new bodies required to have regard to the advice given to them. We hope to work with them all and raise the profile of the Forum with the vast knowledge that members have to impart for the benefit of recreation and access in the county.

I would like to thank all the Forum members for their enthusiasm and commitment, including the two members who have resigned this year, and I would particularly like to welcome the four new members who bring varied expertise to the Forum.



Ronnie Perrin, Chairman



## What is the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex?

The Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS) aims to improve countryside access for all across the county. It is an **independent advisory body, operating on a statutory basis**. Members volunteer their time and are appointed for their range of experience and interests relating to countryside access. The Forum currently has 18 members balanced between recreational users, land managers and those with other interests such as wildlife conservation, the landscape, heritage and working for the disabled. In 2006/2007 it met 4 times, at a variety of venues across the county, to debate topical countryside access issues, respond to relevant consultations and to offer advice. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings. The Forum was established by WSCC in 2003 as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

### Bodies to whom the Forum gives advice

The statutory function of the Forum is to give advice to the following organisations:

- WSCC
- Parish and town councils\*
- The Forestry Commission
- Government departments including: Defra, Highways Agency, Ministry of Defence
- Sport England\*
- District and borough councils
- Natural England
- English Heritage
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Conservation Boards\*

\* New bodies added in 2007

Advice is also given to other organisations and individuals as identified by the Forum.

# Some specific areas of work of the Forum:

## Rights of Way Improvement Plan

- CAFWS has taken an active role in advising WSCC on all aspects of producing its draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)\*, including the structure and content of the document and how to best carry out public consultation.
- The Forum commented on the draft RoWIP at a well attended workshop, at which observations from the Sub Forums were also considered. WSCC will use these to make improvements to the final document.
- The RoWIP will be published in 2007 after which the Forum will continue to work closely with WSCC to advise on delivery, particularly on projects suggested by the Forum and Sub Forums.

*\*The CROW Act placed a duty on all highway authorities to produce a RoWIP by November 2007. This strategic document must include a statement of action that WSCC, as Highways Authority, proposes for the management of rights of way and for securing an improved access network in the future for the benefit of a wide range of users. The public consultation period for the RoWIP for West Sussex was from October 2006 to January 2007.*

## Strategic new developments and planning

- The Forum is keen to ensure access opportunities are maximised through major new developments. To better understand the planning process and what can be achieved through good practice, the Forum invited District and County Planning Officers to a meeting to share their expertise.
- A major part of the Forum's work in the coming year will focus on engaging with relevant planning authorities to give advice on access issues associated with new developments. A working group is being established to consider proposed development at East Grinstead and further working groups (based on the Sub Forums where appropriate) will be set up when needed.



## Access for all

- The Forum recognises that all members of the community should be able to access the countryside and a working group has been set up to investigate the access issues of disabled and less mobile people.
- In the coming year this group plans to advise on the revision of WSCC's Wheelchair Walks booklet and review the County Council's guidelines for managing rights of way in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

## Consultations - Influencing local and national policy

The Forum has had a busy year responding to consultations including:

- Outdoors for All; Diversity Action Plan – Defra
- South Downs Management Plan – South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC)
- England's Trees, Woods and Forests – Defra
- Protection of Common Land in England (The Commons Act 2006) – Defra
- Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy – Environment Agency

## Improving and promoting access

- The Forum has also been pro-active on other access issues and has given advice to various organisations including WSCC, National Trust, Highways Agency, and the South Downs Way National Trail Officer (via a workshop). The Forum has also supported Sussex Pathwatch - a pilot scheme to tackle the illegal and irresponsible use of motorised vehicles in the countryside.



## Presentations

Additional presentations made to the Forum include:

- Accessible Natural Greenspace in the South East Region - Forestry Commission/Natural England
- Mapping Open Access in the South Downs - SDJC
- Cycling issues - Sustrans

## Training

The four new members of the Forum attended an introduction to a rights of way and countryside access training session held by WSCC to prepare them for their role on CAFWS.

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## How can you find out more?

Visit the Forum's website;  
[www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws) or contact:

Fiona MacLeod, Secretary to the Forum  
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If this information is needed in alternative format please contact us and we try to meet your needs. Call 01243 777544.

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## Sub Forums supporting CAFWS

Four Sub Forums representing the Coastal Plain, the South Downs, the Low and High Weald areas of the county support the main Forum. They provide local knowledge and expertise and, in a similar way to the main Forum, are made up of members from a range of interests. The South Downs Access Forum has been set up to advise on access issues across the whole of the South Downs and provides advice to its four 'mother' forums, namely Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, Hampshire and West Sussex.

## Members and recruitment

Members of CAFWS for 2006/07:

Ronnie Perrin (Chair), Peter Brown (Vice-Chair), Bill Acraman, Helen Baldwin, Phil Belden, Julia Beuzeval, Roy Bidwell\*, Derek Deedman, Jason Emrich, Sion Evans, Marion Gue, Ann Janes, Glynn Jones, Trevor Passmore, Paul Quinton\*, David Ribbens, Nigel Sloan, Ted White, David Whyberd, Shirley Wright.

\* resigned in 2007

Vacancies for members do come up from time to time. If you are interested in joining the Forum please contact the Secretary to the Forum for an informal chat.

