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**Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex response to Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan for West Sussex – January 2007**

A workshop to discuss and formulate the Forum's response to the draft RoWIP for West Sussex was held in December 2006. Prior to this workshop all members of the main Forum and Sub-fora were invited to make comments on the Draft via a Comments Log. Each of the four sub fora held meetings to discuss their members' comments.

At the workshop the Forum received an overview of the main points from each Sub-fora. The Comments Log was then used as a tool for formulating the Forum's response. Comments that the majority of the Forum agreed with form part of the official Forum response in the form of an amended Comments Log (appendix A). The main points are summarised below.

**General**

- 1. Duty to deliver the RoWIP** - There is real concern that although the Government has placed a duty of the County Council to produce a RoWIP there is no duty to implement it. The link with the Local Transport Plan and the Highways Section of West Sussex County Council is seen as crucial to the delivery of the RoWIP and every effort must be made to develop the relationships.

**Structure**

- 2. General** - the document is clear, easy to read and provides a good analysis of the RoW network and the way in which it is managed in the West Sussex. However in places the wording is muddled and should be re-considered. The maps provide a quick and easy reference to statutory access in West Sussex.
- 3. Content** – the document as a whole, but specifically the Statement of Action, is not aspirational enough.
- 4. Vision** - this is not a true vision but rather an aim or objective. It is disappointing and needs re-working to be more inspirational and to reflect earlier work of the Forum, where the vision was accompanied by aims or objectives. The Forum felt an additional section is needed near the Issues and Statement of Action (or a revamp of chapter 7) to make a link between the assessment and the actions.

**Details**

- 5. Landscape Areas** – more description of the four areas is needed, in particular highlighting the differences in access provision, users needs and population density.
- 6. South Downs Joint Committee's role in managing access**- The role of the SDJC needs to be made clearer.

7. **Permissive access** – The Plan states that although it is primarily concentrating on the rights of way network all countryside access will be considered and some members felt this is not adequately reflected in the assessment. They feel more attention should be given to existing permissive access.
8. **Mapping; Permissive access and Promoted Long Distance Routes** – There were suggestions that a map showing permissive access should be included however it was acknowledged this is not a simple task but that there could be merit in indicating existing known 'long-term' permissive access (the scale of the maps does not allow specific access to be detailed). This should include access areas managed by Forestry Commission, National Trust and the Sussex Wildlife Trust. A map showing the promoted long distance trails would also add to the visual understanding of available access.
9. **Maintenance (Issue and Actions)** – Continuing to improve the high level of maintenance and management of the existing access network is a key issue and is a high priority. However as this is an *Improvement Plan*, although emphasis may be on maintenance to ensure the current network is fully usable during the early years of the Plan, it is important that improvements to make the network better fit the needs of users are delivered.
10. **Structure of the Statement of Action (SOA)**– this is cluttered and confusing, in particular the 'Additional resources required' columns are difficult to understand.
11. **SOA; Safety** – This is an overarching concern for all access, both existing and new and which perhaps should be emphasised.
12. **SOA; Priorities and Issues Addressed** –The 'Priorities' do not serve any purpose in the main RoWIP and this column should be removed – they are more appropriate to the Projects Database and the Annual Action Plan. The 'Issues addressed' column does not add significantly to the table and should be removed.
13. **SOA; Quantities** - where quantities are put on delivery (ie investigate one route...) they are too low and if only this rate of delivery is to be achieved too few improvements would be realised. The aim must be to deliver significantly more than identified. It would be better to omit any quantities rather than to keep as is at it.
14. **SOA; Partners** – Other organisations need to be included more, in particular users groups and Parish Councils who have a wealth of local knowledge that needs to be utilised. If this clutters the table too much they should be identified in the text preceding the SOA tables.
15. **Funding and Delivery** – Chapter 10 is very weak and needs to be more imaginative and less reliant on West Sussex County Council. There are other organisations and individuals who should play a role in delivery and other approaches should be tested. What is needed is investigation into improvements so if funding does become available there are schemes ready to be implemented.

The Forum looks forward to the publication of the first Annual Action Plan and to seeing the completed database of suggested projects and offers its assistance as required.

It looks forward, even more, to the increase in delivering of access improvement in West Sussex as a result of the RoWIP process.

Forum Officer  
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