

Presentations

Presentations made to the Forum include:

- WSCC Traffic Regulation Order Policy - David Marshall, WSCC Strategic Access and Rights of Way Manager
- West Sussex Local Transport Plan - Andy Hickman, WSCC Integrated Transport Group Manager
- South Downs Way Management – Bill Jenman, South Downs Way National Trail Officer
- Access to Water – Rev D Caffyn; Kevin East, British Canoe Union; Brendan Whelan and Mike Wooldridge, Shoreham Slipways Group



Training

Members of the Forum attended a training day on rights of way legislation hosted by WSCC in May 2005, as well as the National LAF members training event in Birmingham hosted by the Countryside Agency in October 2005.

Future Work

The work programme for 2006-2007 will focus on supporting WSCC in producing its first RoWIP, in particular responding to the draft RoWIP consultation. Following publication, the Forum will continue to have a role giving advice on delivery of actions as the Plan evolves. Specific topics for meetings are planned to include mapping access, cycling, access to woodlands, and access associated with major development.

Recruitment

New members are currently being sought to join the Forum to ensure it retains a continued balance of interests. Anyone with an interest in contributing towards improving access to the countryside, especially those with an interest in forestry, conservation policy, tourism/rural economy or disabled access is invited to apply to join the Forum. If you are interested please contact the Secretary to the Forum for an application pack.

How can you find out more?

The Forum has a website where meeting papers, the work of the Forum and its membership details can be viewed: www.westsussex.gov.uk/countryside (select Access to the Countryside) or you can contact:

Fiona MacLeod, Secretary to the Forum
West Sussex County Council
County Hall
Chichester
West Street
PO19 1RQ
☎ 01243 753542
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If this information is needed in an alternative format please contact us and we will try and meet your needs.
Call 01243 777544

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Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

Annual Report

April 2005 - March 2006



It's been another busy year for the Forum, working on key topics such as open access land, vehicles in the countryside and, most importantly, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill. The Forum has also helped shape national policy by responding to a number of consultation papers from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Countryside Agency.

The Forum has received a number of interesting, varied and informative presentations focusing on access to water (coastal and river), the South Downs Way National Trail and the West Sussex Local Transport Plan. These have all helped towards enabling Forum members gain a fuller understanding of the present and future access needs of both residents and visitors.

The year brought the arrival of Jane Noble from West Sussex County Council (WSCC) as our Forum Access Officer. Jane is currently collating all the information provided by the Forum and Sub Fora members for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The Plan will link with the Local Transport Plan to ensure that common aims are fully explored.

I would like to thank members of the Sub Fora for their continued support and local expertise over the last year.

The Forum will continue to work with all agencies and groups to strive for an inclusive policy for recreation and access for everyone to enjoy our diverse and beautiful West Sussex countryside.

I look forward to another productive year!



Ronnie Perrin, Chairman



What is a Local Access Forum?

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 gave a duty to all Access Authorities (county and unitary councils) to establish an independent Local Access Forum (LAF) with a wide role in advising upon strategic access and recreation issues. This report details the third year of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex.

What is the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex? (CAFWS/the Forum)

The Forum was established in 2003 by WSCC. Forum members volunteer their time to participate in Forum activities and are appointed for their range of experience and interests relating to countryside access. The Forum currently has 18 members representing recreational users, land managers and those with other interests such as wildlife conservation, the landscape, heritage and working for

the disabled. The Forum met 4 times in 2005/2006, at a variety of venues across the county, to debate topical countryside access issues and offer advice to bodies such as WSCC, Defra, the Countryside Agency and other relevant organisations and individuals. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings. The dates and venues are advertised on the Forum's web pages (details on back page).



Sub Fora to the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

Four Sub Fora 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 is a joint Sub Forum reporting to the "mother" fora across the proposed National Park area, namely West Sussex, East Sussex, Hampshire and Brighton & Hove fora. It publishes its own annual report.

Some specific areas of work of the Forum:

Open Access

- Advice was given to WSCC on applying for Countryside Agency grants to open, improve and promote access to areas that have a new right of access under the CROW Act 2000. The successful bids resulted in £95,000 being made available. Work included installing gates and stiles, surfacing paths, signage and production of interpretation material (boards and leaflets) as well as a variety of publicity aimed at promoting access to the public.
- Following the Forum's advice, WSCC now includes open access land on its public interactive mapping system (www.westsussex.gov.uk and search for 'interactive map' on the A-Z).

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

- The CROW Act placed a duty on all highway authorities to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) by November 2007. This strategic document will include a statement of action that WSCC as Highways Authority proposes to take 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.

- Advice was given to WSCC on the structure and content of the Plan through workshops and regular Forum meetings. The four Sub Fora provided project suggestions to be considered and included as part of the RoWIP process.
- WSCC's draft RoWIP will be out for public consultation in Autumn 2006.

Influencing Local and National Policy

- The Forum has responded to consultations from Defra on the Amendments of the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations, and the NERC Bill, specifically the sections relating to rights of way.

Improving and Promoting Access

- The Forum has provided advice on improving access and related services to various organisations including WSCC, Forestry Commission, Defra, Highways Agency, South Downs Way National Trail Officer and the Youth Hostel Association.
- The Forum has worked with WSCC to offer improved access information on its website. Pages on Open Access, RoWIP and the Forum can be viewed at www.westsussex.gov.uk/countryside.