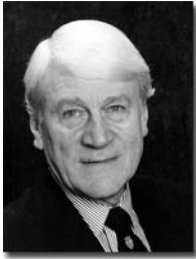


Annual Report of the West Sussex Local Access Forum and its Sub-Forums 2003/2004



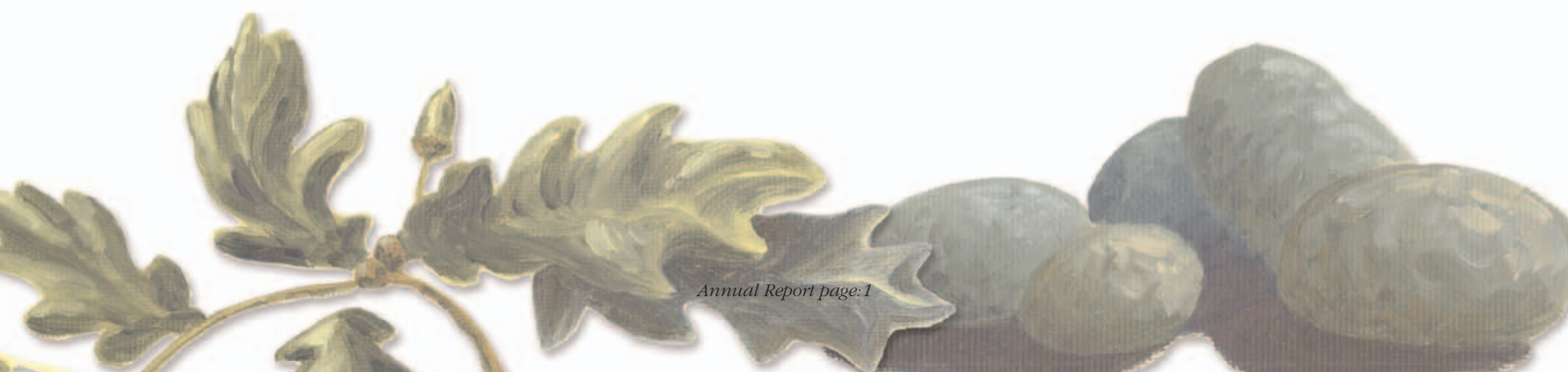
Introduction by Ian Elliott as Chairman of the Forum

The Forum has a challenging task. Not only has it to advise the Access Authority (West Sussex County Council) and others on improving public access for recreation and enjoyment of the West Sussex countryside, but in doing so it must take account of the needs of land management, the conservation of the natural beauty and biodiversity.

The Forum has been able to call on a wide range of experienced practitioners in these fields. It is to be further assisted by four sub-forums that will be able to think and advise in greater detail about the needs and opportunities in each locality, and can monitor the situation more closely.

A lot has been achieved in our first year, although the conclusive maps are not yet available. We have excellent groups of committed and knowledgeable members who have already established good working relationships. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be for the Forum to establish its own style and independence of thought. It must be realistic about problems and needs without allowing that clarity to be clouded by the necessarily close working relationship with the Access Authority.

A good start has been made.



What is Access Land and the West Sussex Local Access Forum?

Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gives the public on foot a new right of access to mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land (Access Land). The legal record of access land is the conclusive access map and access rights will become exercisable when the Government issues the relevant commencement order. In the south east of England, this is expected to be in September 2004.

The West Sussex Local Access Forum was established under the 2000 Act by the County Council, as the Access Authority, to advise the authority on enabling and managing open access and on the preparation of a rights of way improvement plan. The members of the Forum were appointed for their experience and interest in a range of areas related to access. The group of 22 members was balanced between those who use the countryside for recreation, those who own and manage the land and those with other interests such as wildlife conservation, the landscape, heritage and working for the disabled.

The West Sussex Local Access Forum covers the whole administrative area of the County of West Sussex. Sub-Forums have been set up to cover the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the High Weald, the Low Weald and the Coastal Plain. The role of the Sub-Forums is to advise and assist the West Sussex Local Access Forum in fulfilling its statutory function. The Access Authority sees local arrangements for enabling and managing access as an essential element of the successful introduction of the new access rights.

What does the West Sussex Local Access Forum do?

The prime function of the West Sussex Local Access Forum is as a statutory advisory body to the County Council as Access Authority. The West Sussex Access Forum will advise on issues related to improving access for all users of the countryside whilst encouraging wildlife and enabling the landowner to make use of his/her land.

The role of the West Sussex Local Access Forum is to provide advice and comments to the Access Authority on:



These are our members and their area/s of interest

Mr W. E. Acraman	Rights of way/rural environment issues
Mrs C. Barnes	Landowner
Mrs H. Baldwin	Riding/driving (horses)
Mr P. Belden	Countryside management
Mr R. Bidwell	Cycling
Mr P. Brown	Countryside management
Mr J. Couzens	Driving
Mr D. Deedman	Highways/environmental projects
Mr I. Elliott	Conservation/recreation
Mr. D.S. Evans	Driving (horses)
Mrs L. Hare	Girl-guiding/outdoor pursuits for young people
Mrs P.A. Janes	Walking/rural issues
Mr G. Jones	Recreation/access management/nature conservation
Mr T. Passmore	Farming
Mrs V. Perrin	Riding
Mr P. Quinton	Working for the disabled
Mr N. Sloan	Walking
Mr W. Trinick	Land management
Mrs N. Webber	Walking/cycling/riding
Dr T. Whitbread	Conservation policy
Mr A.E. White	Conservation/walking
Mrs S. Wright	Landscape/countryside a

- The preparation and review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Making improvements to the rights of way network by identifying gaps and unavailable footpaths
- The making of by-laws in relation to access land
- The appointment of wardens for access land
- Proposals for long-term restrictions on the public use of access land

- Erecting and maintaining notices on access land and action on misleading notices
- Proposals to remove or relax general restrictions on public use of access land
- Proposals to correct errors and omissions in the conclusive access map
- Proposals by landowners to voluntarily dedicate land as access land
- Establishing or improving means of access to access land

In addition the West Sussex Local Access Forum may wish to influence other bodies like DEFRA (Government) or the Countryside Agency by responding to consultations and giving advice on plans, policies and strategies on access issues.

How was the West Sussex Local Access Forum formed?

Advertisements were placed in the local papers for independent members of the public who wished to be considered for the Local Access Forum. In addition a number of organisations were contacted for potential members. There were over 30 applications for the 22 places. The County Council selected the members against a set of criteria. The selection panel aimed to achieve a balance of interests, age and gender to ensure that the forum represented as many views and interests as possible.

When and where have we met?

The West Sussex Local Access Forum has met 4 times in its first year. The meetings have been located around the county, the first meeting in March 2003 was in Chichester, the June meeting in Haywards Heath, the September meeting in Billingshurst and the January meeting in Midhurst.

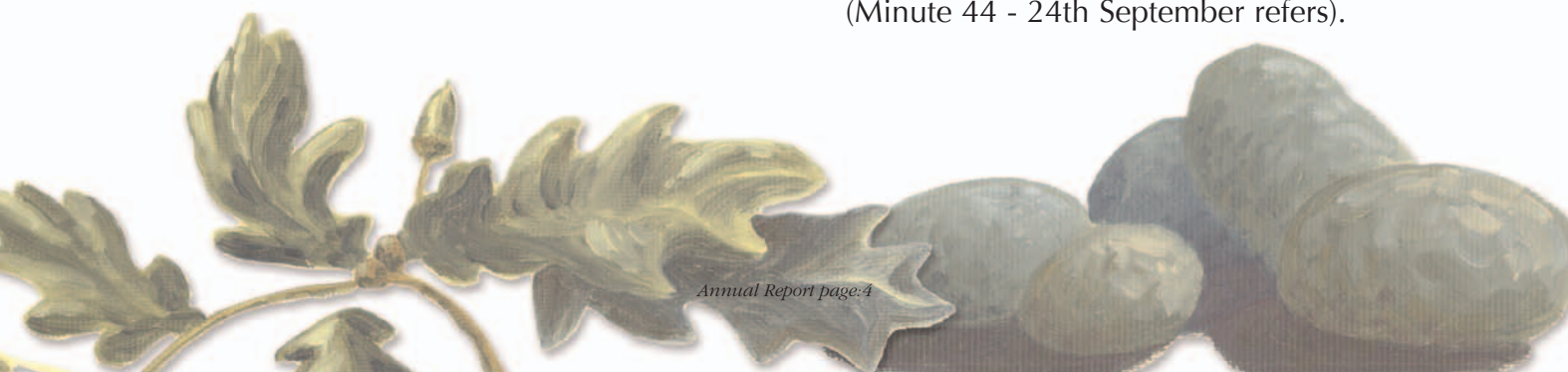
What subjects have been considered and what action have we taken?

A summary of the main items considered by the Forum.

- (1) The Forum members have received presentations from the Countryside Agency and Officers of West Sussex County Council on their role and function as a Local Access Forum. (Minutes 21 and 22 - 10th June 2003 refer).
- (2) The members received background information on the Milestones Statement for West Sussex, which sets targets for various areas of rights of way work, including the consideration of claims for new paths, changes to the network of existing paths and maintenance. Most of the Milestone Statement targets will be included in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, one of the main areas of work for the West Sussex Local Access Forum. (Minute 24 - 10th June refers).



- (3) The members of the Forum have agreed to take part in a regional pilot for the development of a National Countryside Access Database, being set up by the Countryside Agency. (Minute 37 - 24th September refers).
- (4) The Forum considered and discussed the DEFRA consultation paper on regulations relating to the removal or relaxation of general restrictions on access land. The views of the Forum were notified to DEFRA in response to the consultation. (Minute 39 - 24th September refers).
- (5) The Forum members were asked to raise issues that they would like to be considered in the formation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. A questionnaire was devised to seek the views from a variety of Rights of Way users and land managers. The questionnaire was widely circulated. (Minute 44 - 24th September refers).



(6) The West Sussex Local Access Forum has responded to the DEFRA Consultation Paper on Use of Mechanically Powered Vehicles on Rights of Way. (Minutes 82-87 - 20th January refer).

The formation of sub-forums

Four sub-forums have been established to ensure that the West Sussex Local Access Forum is advised on local issues. The four areas proposed are based on the countryside management areas of the County, the Coastal Plain, the High Weald, the Low Weald and the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. For the last of these a joint sub-forum has been formed with other access authorities to advise on the whole of the South Downs. There is a delegate of the West Sussex Local Access Forum on each of the sub-forums. The Low Weald, High Weald and Coastal Plain Sub-Forums all met for the first time in December 2003, the South Downs joint sub-forum had its first meeting in September 2003.

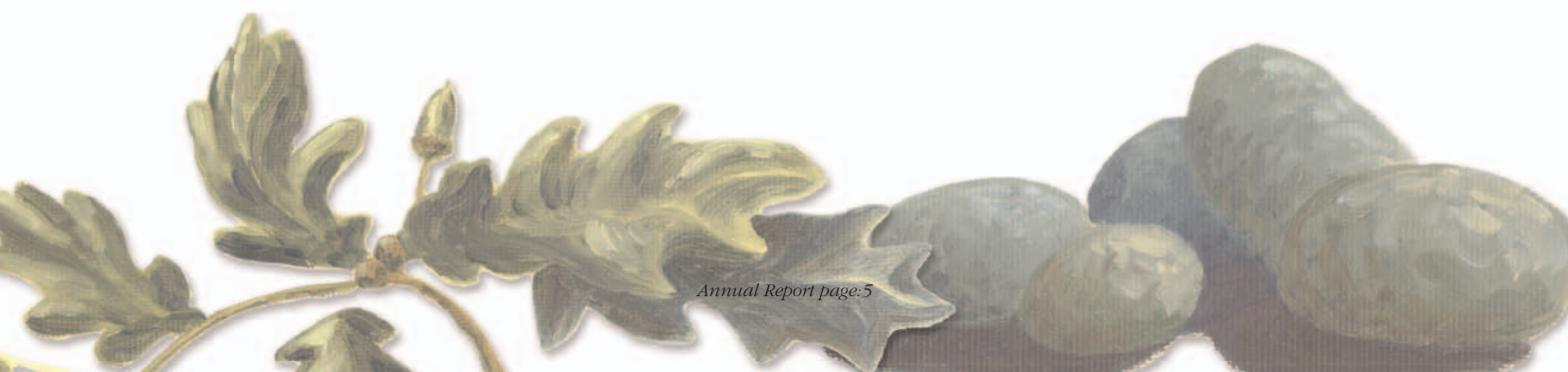
Reports from the sub-forums by Roland Seber (Access Officer)

Coastal Plain Access Sub-Forum

The membership of the Coastal Plain Sub Forum is now 12. There is a good spread of interests represented, from walking, cycling, horse riding and carriage driving as well as recent additions of members from the West Sussex Disabilities Network and the Langmeads Estate-

The development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan has been discussed. The use of maps, local knowledge of volunteers, Parish Councils in addition the West Sussex County Council Ranger network have contributed to gathering the necessary local information. The sub-forum has identified the following priorities for their work programme:-

- Creation and promotion of long distance routes in and through the area
- Sustainable transport routes
- Provide safe short links between communities and existing paths
- Improve the provision of bridleways south of the A27
- Consider issues relating to disabled and elderly users of the rights of way network
- The erosion of coastal paths



Low Weald Access Sub-Forum

Membership of the Low Weald Sub Forum is just 8 at present. There are members from the horse riding, walking and carriage driving interests as well as two farmers. Members representing cycling interests as well as disabilities and youth groups would improve the range of interests on this sub forum. The sub-forum is also involved in the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and will consider issues similar to the Coastal Plain Sub Forum. The Low Weald Sub Forum have identified the following issues for consideration:-

- The need for better recreational car parking provision in the countryside
- The need for designated 'quiet lanes'
- Develop the involvement of volunteers in rights of way maintenance work
- More resources to be put into the provision of improved stiles which are easier for the elderly and disabled to use.



- That the Wey and Arun Canal could provide a possible long distance route for walkers, cyclists and horse riders
- Problems caused by large numbers of cyclists taking part in organised events/races on the Downs Link

West Sussex High Weald Access Sub-Forum

The High Weald Sub Forum has 7 members. There is good representation from user groups like walking, cycling and horse riding but there is a need for better representation from the land-owning interests as well as, youth and disability groups. The High Weald Sub Group are involved in the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in the same way as the Coastal Plain and Low Weald Sub Groups. Other priorities for consideration by the High Weald Sub Group include the creation of circular routes and links to local attractions.

For information about the membership of the West Sussex sub-forums please contact the Access Forum Officer.

South Downs Access Forum - Report by the Glynn Jones (Chairman)

The South Downs Access Forum (SDAF) is a joint sub-forum of the West Sussex, East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Local Access Forums and the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (the parent forums). It is funded by contributions from the local authorities, the Countryside Agency, the



Sussex Downs Conservation Board and the East Hampshire AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

The SDAF has been set up to provide advice to the parent forums – and through them to the highways/access authorities, and other bodies – on how to make the South Downs more accessible and enjoyable for open air recreation. In providing this advice, we take into account social, environmental and economic interests and look at both local and strategic issues. By considering the South Downs as a whole, the SDAF can supply advice and quality standards uniformly across the full length of the South Downs and avoid duplication of effort across four separate parent forums.



The SDAF has had three meetings so far – the first being in September 2003, and the last in February this year. We plan to hold at least four meetings a year. In January, we appointed a Forum Officer on a part-time basis to co-ordinate and support the work of the SDAF.

In consultation with the parent forums we have put together a work plan for 2004-05. Initially we plan to focus on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. In particular, the SDAF is focusing on the requirements of open access land on the South Downs and on helping the local authorities with their Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

At our last meeting, we discussed the open access maps prepared by the Countryside Agency. We set up working groups to look at the maps for each of the areas covered by the four parent forums. The groups explored what new infrastructure will be needed – such as additional access points, footpaths, and wardening – for areas designated as access land when the legislation comes into force later this year.

What are our plans for the coming year?

- ✓ To consider the options to establish access to access land, opened up under the CRoW Act.
- ✓ To start work on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Would you like to get involved?

We would welcome your involvement!

- The Forum has a web-site at www.westsussex.gov.uk which gives biographies of each of our members, all our agendas, papers and minutes. These documents are also available on paper by contacting Roland Seber the Forum Officer on 01243 756863.



- You may wish to contact the member who represents your interest - to find out who this is and their contact details, speak to the Forum Officer.
- Meetings are open to the public, if you wish to ask questions at a meeting, you can ask to do this by arranging to do so at least one week in advance of the meeting by contacting the Forum Officer.
- In addition to the members of the Forum, we welcome observers from a range of organisations, including officers from the neighbouring Local Access Forums and the Countryside Agency. If you would like your organisation to become a regular observer, please contact the Forum Officer.
- Forthcoming meetings in 2004 are on 7th July in Horsham and 6th October in Billingshurst.

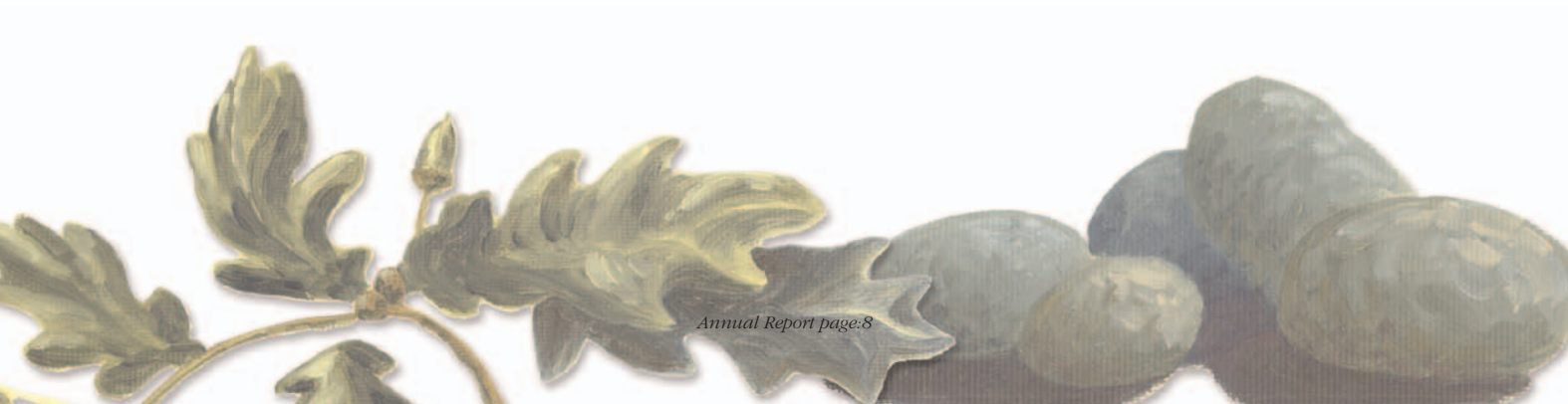
How can you contact us?

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 Web-site: www.westsussex.gov.uk



Photos:
 Front cover
 Top left: South Downs. WSCC/PPL
 Middle: High Weald. Iain McGowan/WSCC/PPL
 Top right: Bluebells in West Stoke. Gary Rustell/WSCC
 Below right: Bosham Quay. Gary Rustell/WSCC

Inside
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 Page 5: Shoreham Beach. Lynne Fox/WSCC/PPL
 Page 6: Sussex farm scene, Low Weald. WSCC/PPL
 Page 7: Sign at Charlton. Gary Rustell/WSCC
 Page 8: East Dean. Martin O'Neill/WSCC/PPL



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Mark Hammond, Director for Environment and Development
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