

Mid Sussex Core Strategy Pre-Submission Document

Comments of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS) 18th March 2008

General - The document has a feel of being all about utility routes, giving very little importance to routes and rights of way for leisure and recreation use, but these are just as important for communities – both for health, quality of life, and safety.

Section 2 The Spatial Vision – The document rightly highlights the quality of the countryside within the District, which provides an important context for quality of life and for attracting investment. Within the Vision, it should state a need for the countryside to be accessible for the enjoyment of all.

Section 3 Characteristics – In 3.18 it is appropriate to refer to the wide network of public rights of way which is a major resource and benefit to residents and visitors alike, not just refer to “ancient route ways”.

Section 4 Issues, Problems and Challenges – In 4.4, there needs to be specific reference to implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) as this will give a clear framework for deficiencies and local needs. While we do have a good and well maintained network in West Sussex, it is far from satisfactory. The prospect of new development and changes in land use may provide opportunities to solve some problems and to rectify mistakes in the past. Where there is a new large scale residential development, there will be great additional pressure on the local network and necessary improvements should be funded from the development pot.

PPG 17 para 32 states that “Rights of way are an important recreational facility, which local authorities should protect and enhance. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for walkers, cyclists and horseriders, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks.”

At 4.13 new cycle routes are mentioned. It is important that they are not designed just in the context of a new development or as a utility route – they need to fit into a wider network. Leisure cycling is just as important, as the majority of cyclists probably come under this heading, including children.

4.21 Infrastructure Objective. This should include and specify what is sometimes called Green Infrastructure – particularly the provision of traffic free multi-use routes (green corridors) within and through areas of new development. These are required to meet the needs of the community providing links to the wider network and access to the countryside. A commitment ensuring that access to the countryside is not severed by major infrastructure (such as roads) is needed. In addition, this heading seems to include leisure and recreation, so should comments be included under the Cultural Objective? Design Objective – for all new

development a Design and Access Statement is required to show that the access needs are being met.

Section 5 Spatial Strategy – CAFWS agrees about the growth potential for green tourism in the area. Mention could be made of a number of strategic and promoted routes through the district (eg South Downs Way) and the developing National Cycling Network promoted by Sustrans. The network of paths attract visitors from abroad, from across the country and from within the District. This asset must be protected and considered when new development is being planned. Wherever possible new routes should be multi-use.

There has been a great increase in equestrian activities in recent years and this has a relationship with tourism and also recreational aspirations of residents. Young children are very vulnerable on country lanes when they become “rat runs” following development. Consequently, re-use of farm buildings to establish riding stables, for example, might sound attractive but it should only be permitted where there is access to a network of public bridleways or there is enough exercising land available to the enterprise.

5.40 Culture - This section includes leisure and recreation – see comments under 4.21.

5.42 states that the Cultural Strategy will be revised in 2008. Please include the Forum in consultations to determine if they should have an input to the new document.

Section 8 Core Policy 24 – Section 6 of General Principles of Development for Strategic Locations at Haywards Heath/Lindfield must be included in all strategic developments (in this document specifically the inclusion of Burgess Hill and East Grinstead) regarding the creation of ‘green corridors’ for all users, including equestrians.

Section 9 Sustainable Rural Communities – Rural Evidence Base 9.5-6: The West Sussex ROWIP will give a broad statement of needs, but CAFWS hope that in the future individual parishes will draw up their own local ROWIPs.

Section 10 Generic Core Policies – Infrastructure 10.10-17: CAFWS supports the need for adequate footpaths and cycleways to serve the needs of the community. However, there is no reference to bridleways/multi-use routes which in some respects are just important – certainly in relation to recreation and rural tourism. It should also be remembered that bridleways are used by cyclists and may be important links into villages and between towns and facilities. They are the paths that can be used by all and are especially important on the urban fringe, where a large number of equestrians will be found. Opportunities should be taken with new development to promote and enhance strong physical links with adjoining countryside

Improvements to bridleways must make them easier, safer and/or more enjoyable for pedestrians and/or horse riders, enhancing their suitability for use. Any work to a bridleway which detracts from its suitability might not be a proper exercise of the highways authorities powers.

Transport 10.18-21 – Transport needs to refer to recreational routes as well as utility access to work or school. So again, there should be reference to horse riding and bridleways, although the use of a horse to get to work is likely to remain a minority activity! As provision for equestrians is included in the West Sussex Transport Plan, they should be mentioned alongside walkers and cyclists. Their safety is just as important and development should not make their routes more difficult to use.

Character and Design 10.32-34 – reference should be made to Design and Access statements.