

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

At a meeting of the Forum held at the Civic Centre, Adur District Council, Shoreham by Sea, on 2nd March 2005.

Present: Mrs. R. Perrin (Chairman)

Mr. B. Acraman	Mr. P. Brown	Mr. T. Passmore
Mrs. H. Baldwin	Mr. D. Deedman	Mr. P. Quinton
Mr. P. Belden	Mr. S. Evans	Mr. N. Sloan
Mr R. Bidwell	Mr. G. Jones	Mr. W. Trinick
		Mr. T. White

In attendance: Tricia Butcher, Nigel Hiscoke, Jonathan Mitchell, Jennifer Morgan, Derek Stewart-Smith, Andrew Whitnall, Valerie Woodfield.

Officers in attendance: Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Mark Henshall, Christine Luff, Jane Noble, Rosemary Pugh.

Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

1. The Secretary read out a personal note from Ian Elliott. He thanked all members of the forum for their contributions to the work of the forum in its first two years and explained that he would not be standing for re-election as Chairman or be remaining as a member of the forum.
2. Resolved - That Mrs. Ronnie Perrin be appointed Chairman and Mr William Trinick be appointed Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.
3. The Chairman suggested that a letter of thanks be sent to Ian Elliott.
4. Since members of the forum were initially appointed for a two year period in March 2003, Mark Henshall requested that any member, who did not wish to continue their membership for the next three years, should write and inform the Secretary.

Action: Rosemary Pugh

Apologies

5. Apologies for absence were received from Ann Janes and Shirley Wright.

Welcome

6. The Chairman welcomed Jane Noble, the newly appointed Access Officer, Nigel Hiscoke (Defra), Valerie Woodfield (Countryside Agency), other observers and members of the public in attendance.

Declarations of Interest

7. On Item 6, matters arising – Glynn Jones declared a personal interest as the National Trust owns land adjacent to registered common land at Telegraph House.

Minutes

8. Resolved – That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on 1st December 2004 be approved and that they be signed as a correct record.

Matters arising

9. On item 128, access to fenced common land at Telegraph House; (Register Unit No. 213), Nigel Sloan reported that the owner of the land at Telegraph House had now erected more signs using the Open Access symbol and explicitly stating that there was no access to the land. Christine Luff advised that the erection of false or misleading notices discouraging users from accessing access land is an offence and would be dealt with by a Magistrates' Court. (Section 14 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW). Mark Henshall advised that if the Magistrate decided to convict then the landowner could be fined or ordered to remove the signs or both.

10. The following points were made in the discussion that followed: -

- The 'softly softly' approach taken so far by the South Downs Access Forum was no longer appropriate as the landowner had blatantly challenged this by the erection of more notices which used the 'end of access land' logo.
- The law had been broken and a fundamental purpose of the CROW Act had been questioned.
- There had been no response from the owner or her agent to a letter written previously by the Highway Authority.
- There was a requirement now for the Highway Authority to take some firmer action but preferably to avoid legal action.
- The issue of 'Commons' Rights' was not for the forum or Highway Authority to consider. Defra should be notified on this issue. (Christine Luff has since confirmed that register unit CL213 is not subject to registered rights of common).
- The issue of whether or not the land was excepted land was not relevant in this case.

11. Resolved – that the Highway Authority as Access Authority be advised to write and request a face to face meeting with the landowner or her agent. If a positive response to the request for a meeting is not received within two weeks of receipt of the letter, the Access Authority should start legal proceedings.

Action: Christine Luff

Membership of the Forum

12. The Forum received and noted a report by the Access Officer on membership of the Forum (copy attached to the signed minutes).

13. Jane Noble advised the Forum that it had proved difficult to recruit a new member with youth and farming interests and that similar difficulties had occurred finding someone with an interest in tourism and the rural economy. She added that the Forum might consider recruiting a member with an interest in woodland or forestry.

14. The Forum expressed the view that in future the views and opinions of interest groups like 'youth' could be communicated to the Forum in other ways, rather than having to become a member of the Forum. The use of the 'themed' meeting would be the sensible way to make sure that the Forum had the opportunity to hear the views of a wider range of members of the public with an interest in access to the countryside. The Forum also considered that landowners on the South Downs were well represented on the Forum and that a non-South Downs riparian landowner should be sought.

15. Resolved – (a) that the Highway Authority be advised to appoint the following new members: -
- (i) Peter Fancourt with an area of interest in motorised vehicles in the countryside.
 - (ii) A member from the Sussex Association of Local Councils (SALC)
- (b) that the Highway Authority continues to seek individuals with the following areas of interest: -
- (i) Riparian landowner outside the South Downs area
 - (ii) Woodland or forestry

Action: Jane Noble

Annual Report

16. The Forum considered the draft annual report and made the following recommendations: -

- (a) The text to be made more succinct in order for the document to be interesting and easier for members of the public to read.

(b) That the report produced for 2005/2006 be shorter but that the detail included in this year's report should always be available for members of the public. The website could be used for this.

17. Resolved – that the annual report be approved and published subject to the amendment made in 16 (a) above.

Action: Jane Noble/Rosemary Pugh

Access

17. Nigel Hiscoke of the Defra Rural Development Service gave the Forum a talk on latest developments on Agri-Environmental Schemes – permissive access. An information leaflet was tabled at the meeting (copy attached to the signed minutes).

The following points were made in the discussion that followed:-

- Public knowledge about new permissive agreements. The possibility of recording permissive paths on Ordnance Survey maps. Nigel Hiscoke agreed to look into this.
- The need for good consultation between landowners, local people and other bodies like the South Downs Conservation Board to ensure that all new access, whether it be CROW Act access or permissive access created under the Agri-Environmental Schemes, was created in a co-ordinated way. There was information available, via websites about new access to assist this process.
- The opportunity for improving access for the disabled. Nigel Hiscoke agreed to contact Paul Quinton with more information which could be included in the Disabilities Network newsletter.

Access Management Grant Scheme (AMGS)

18. Jane Noble updated members on latest developments with the management of the AMGS. She reported that there was still quite a lot work to be done, although the Sussex Downs Conservation Board had made a good start on installing infrastructure. Jane reported that the Countryside Agency had advised that funding for the maintenance of infrastructure should be forthcoming through the Rapid Response Service for the next three years at a rate of 75%. In the longer term there was a need for further funding and suggested that a letter be sent to Defra at the appropriate time emphasising the need for a maintenance budget.

Action: Jane Noble

Maps of Access Land

19. Maps showing the distribution of access land in the county were tabled.

Establishment of access to registered common land with no means of public access

20. Christine Luff reported that the Ordnance Survey had been informed that two permissive agreements had been completed at Marehill Common, Pulborough and Sware Lane, Sutton. She added that for the time being she was not able to report any further progress to establish a means of reaching another 'island' parcel of registered common land near Decoy Lane, Tangmere.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

20. The Forum received and noted a report by the Forum Officer on the West Sussex ROWIP (copy attached to the signed minutes).

21. Lisa Creaye-Griffin advised that the rights of way team would be working closely with the Local Transport Plan (LTP) team over the next few months and that there were some projects suggested by the sub-fora which would be suitable for inclusion in the LTP this summer.

22. Jane Noble reported that Nigel Sloan had made some suggestions for minor amendments to the report on the working group. These would be discussed at the next meeting of the working group on 18th April 2005.

23. Resolved - (a) the Forum advise the Highway Authority that a short report on the ROWIP be included in the provisional LTP in summer 2005.
- (b) that the Forum approves the objectives set out in the note of the meeting of the West Sussex ROWIP working group.
- (c) that the Forum endorses the response to the Highway Authority on the Stakeholders Consultation Stage 2.

Proposed government legislation on use of mechanically propelled vehicles on public rights of way and on gating public rights of way to prevent crime or anti-social behaviour.

24. The Forum received and noted a report by the County Secretary on the proposed legislation (as above), (copy attached to the signed minutes).

General Report

25. The Forum received and noted a general report on a range of issues of interest to the Forum.

Regional event for forum members

26. Valerie Woodfield, Countryside Agency advised that there was funding available to hold a regional event in the south east for members of local access fora. Valerie described some of the suggested topics for discussion and added that if there was sufficient interest it might be possible to run two events, one

in London and the other outside London. Several members of the Forum thought the event would be very useful and expressed a preference for the event to be held outside London.

Access to water

27. A report by the Reverend Caffyn was tabled at the Forum for members to read and then discuss at a later meeting when the Environment Agency would also be invited to talk about access to water.

Agenda for the next meeting

28. The agenda for the next meeting would include items on: -

- Motorised vehicles in the countryside
- Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Access Management Grant Scheme
- Access to water – Input from Environment Agency
- Telegraph House

Date of next meeting

29. The date for the next meeting was changed and will now be held at 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday 25th May 2005 at Capron House, Midhurst.

Chairman