

Unconfirmed minutes – subject to approval/amendment at the next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

At a meeting of the Forum held at Clair Hall, Haywards Heath on 6th October 2005.

Present:

Mrs R Perrin (Chairman)

Mrs H Baldwin	Mr P Belden	Mr R Bidwell
Mr P Brown	Mr D Deedman	Mr S Evans
Mr F Fancourt	Mrs A Janes	Mr G Jones
Mr D Ribbens	Mr N Sloan	Mr T White
Mrs S Wright		

WSCC Officers: Christine Luff, David Marshall, Jane Noble, Chris Punnett, Roland Seber.

Apologies

65. Apologies for absence were received from Mr W Acraman, Mr T Passmore and Mr W Trinick.

Welcome

66. The Chairman welcomed Mr Fancourt to the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

67. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

68. Mr Deedman pointed out that there was no reference in the minutes to the item he had raised under "Matters Arising" concerning vehicles in the countryside (minute no. 124; 2004 refers).

The officers confirmed that at the May meeting they had indicated that this was awaiting the attendance of a representative of the users of motorised vehicles. They advised that the matter would be included in the work programme for the forthcoming year.

69. Mr Belden drew attention to minute no. 40 and indicated that 'South Downs Access Forum' should read 'South Downs Conservation Board'.

70. Mr Sloan referred to minute no. 43 and reminded the Committee that it had been agreed that this matter would be reviewed in twelve months time.

71. **Resolved** – That subject to the views/amendments detailed above the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on

25th May 2005 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

Membership of the Forum

72. In relation to minute no. 33, Jane Noble advised that as previously agreed she would in due course be seeking new members to represent conservation policy, riparian landowners (preferably outside the South Downs) and forestry interests through press releases to relevant publications. The Forum also agreed to her suggestion that if someone suitable came forward it would be useful that sustainable transport interests were represented. Mr Jones drew attention to the desirability of succession planning.

Action: Jane Noble

Quag's Corner, Stedham Common (CL12)

73. In relation to minute no. 44, Christine Luff reported that the County Council was still in correspondence with the landowner and members would be kept informed.

Action: Christine Luff

Ordnance Survey Maps

74. In relation to minute no. 62, Jane Noble reported that ensuring that access details were shown on Ordnance Survey maps would be included in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Access routes on WSCC land would be targeted first.

Action: Jane Noble

Equestrian Access

75. In relation to minute no. 57, the Chairman reported on DEFRA's response to the Forum's request for improved equestrian access to Forestry Commission land. The advice received was that one of the statutory functions of Local Access Forums is to give advice to the Forestry Commission, and that this Forum should therefore contact the Commission direct to give advice regarding appropriate access arrangements. Mrs Baldwin reported that the height barriers that had recently been installed at Forestry Commission managed car park entrances were causing difficulties to some users, in particular to people boxing their horses to the South Downs to access the bridleway network there and the Forum agreed this should be included in a letter to the Forestry Commission.

Action: Jane Noble

76. Members agreed with this suggestion but considered that other owners/managers of woodland subject to public access should also be approached. They asked that when appropriate representatives had been

identified they be asked to attend a future meeting to participate in a discussion on access to woodlands, including how the needs of equestrians could be met. Members were asked to submit details of any forestry contacts and issues concerning access to woodlands which they were aware of to Jane Noble by 31st October.

Action: CAFWS Members/Jane Noble

Urgent Matters

DEFRA Farm Walk

77. Jane Noble reported on a Tourism South East/DEFRA farm walk planned for 5th November 2005 at Broadbridge Farm, west of Horsham, at which a WSCC officer had been invited to talk about Rights of Way and access matters. Members of the Forum would be welcome to attend and further details would be made available to any interested member as soon as they became available.

Action: Jane Noble

Illegal use of motorised vehicles in the countryside

78. Jane Noble advised that the South Downs Joint Committee was working in partnership with Sussex Police and other bodies to reduce the illegal use of rights of way by motorised vehicles, initially concentrating on the area covered by Chichester District. Members were encouraged to report any instances of illegal vehicle use to the police, ensuring that an incident number is received. The project was in its early stages but could possibly form an item for a future meeting of the Forum.

Action: Jane Noble

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

79. Jane Noble reported that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) was still being prepared, and that a draft would now be submitted to the December 2005 meeting of the Forum. She outlined the likely content, and advised that she was considering holding an event for access providers to encourage them to engage with the RoWIP process. She sought (and received) advice from members regarding other organisations which should be involved in delivery of the Plan. Accompanying the RoWIP would be an annual 'rolling programme' action plan, which will detail specific projects to be delivered.
80. Members were asked their views on how to conduct public consultation on the draft RoWIP. It was agreed that a questionnaire based system would be appropriate, and that for ease of analysis 'closed' questions with specific alternative responses should be used for the majority of questions. There should however also be some 'open' questions where respondents could express views in their own words.

Action: Jane Noble

Local Transport Plan (LTP) Consultation

81. The Forum received a presentation from Andy Hickman of WSCC Highways and Transport Division. He gave an overview of the Local Transport Plan (LTP), including the key outputs which the Plan was expected to provide as part of the requirements of the Transport Act 2000. A paper showing the relationship between the West Sussex Transport Plan and the wider planning framework is attached to the file copy of these minutes.
82. The draft LTP had been submitted to stakeholders (including the WSCAF) for consultation between December 2004 and February 2005. Final consultation on the provisional Plan was now taking place and due to end on 31st October. Comments from Forum Members were welcomed. The plan can be viewed at www.westsussex.gov.uk/LTP2consultation or hard copies can be viewed at libraries or at County Hall. The full Plan (including an accessibility strategy) covers the period 2006-2016, and would be submitted for approval in March 2006.

Action: CAFWS Members

83. The key objectives for the coastal, urban and Gatwick diamond areas were to achieve accessibility, reduce pollution, reduce congestion and improve road safety. Maintenance of roads was a key priority, with 50% of available finance ring-fenced for that, but it was nevertheless possible to be creative. The new funding formula would benefit WSCC in the long term, although the next few years could see a reduction in the amount available. Members expressed a concern that funding for implementation of the RoWIP is not ring-fenced within the LTP funding.
84. Successes to date included an increase in bus patronage (the Crawley Fastway) and improved road safety through safe routes to school (Thakeham). Pathfinder status gave increased flexibility to be innovative and to provide different types of signing outside schools.
85. Members noted areas where improvements were needed, such as rural path/highway crossing points (in respect of which Mr Hickman indicated that the need to improve safety had been recognised, and one possible solution may be to use interactive signs where there are particular problems).
86. Members identified that 'white lanes' can provide important links in the path network and that they considered there was scope to improve management of these routes. Mr Hickman suggested identifying which ones are the most important. Mrs Helen Baldwin agreed to provide information on 'White Lanes' to Mr Sion Evans, who was concerned that these should be discussed by the Forum at an early date. The Chairman indicated that this matter could be added to the items to be considered for the future work programme and she reminded Mr Evans that Ms Noble was already very busy and it was important not to dilute her efforts.
87. The Chairman thanked Mr Hickman for his presentation, and for responding to members' questions.

DEFRA Consultation

(a) Diversions of Rights of Way

88. The Forum considered a report submitted by Christine Luff, Rights of Way Team Leader, on Government consultation on its proposed approach to implementing two separate provisions in Schedule 6 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 relating to diversions of public rights of way for the protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and temporary diversions for dangerous works (copy attached to the signed minutes).
89. Members commented on various aspects of the report. Generally on the SSSI diversion proposals they felt that English Nature should be required to consider other options ahead of diversion, and on question 1, they felt that wildlife groups and the anticipated National Park Authority should be included as consultees. On landowner-led diversions for temporary works, members considered that only the minimum diversion possible should be permitted, on to an off-road route wherever possible. On question 5, types of works covered by temporary diversion regulations, it was agreed that stubble burning could be added to the list of activities identified in the officer's report. Because the maximum period of closure is 14 days, the new provisions would probably not be appropriate for another suggestion, i.e. longer term bridge repairs or repairing flood damage, and in any event it was likely that such works are already provided for in other legislation. A further suggestion for closure for sporting events such as terrier racing was also not really appropriate because such events would not fall into the category of "dangerous works". On question 6 a member considered that strict controls should be put in place to ensure that landowners properly advertise their intentions.
90. The views of members were noted.

Action: Christine Luff

(b) Vehicular access over common and other land

91. The Forum noted a report submitted by Christine Luff, Rights of Way Team Leader at the meeting, on DEFRA consultation on Section 68 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 relating to vehicular access over common and other land (copy attached to the signed minutes).
92. Members were advised that the County Council was unlikely to send a formal response to the consultation, as the proposals primarily affect the rights of individual property owners, but that if they wished to comment these could be sent to directly to DEFRA or to Mrs Luff.

Action: Christine Luff

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill

93. The Forum noted a report submitted by Christine Luff, Rights of Way Team Leader, on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill, which includes proposals to clarify the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on

public rights of way and the scope for claiming Byways Open to All Traffic (copy attached to the signed minutes).

94. Mrs Luff advised members that where claim applications for Byways Open to All Traffic were submitted before the legislation takes effect, the duty on the County Council to investigate would remain.

Review of Local Access Forums

(a) Countryside Agency Review

95. The Forum noted a report by the Forum Officer on a review of Local Access Forums (LAFs) carried out by the Countryside and Community Research Unit of the University of Gloucestershire on behalf of the Countryside Agency (copy attached to the signed minutes).
96. Members considered that the Forum complied with many of the good practice indicators, although it was felt there was still some room for improvement. In particular the following points were raised:
- The need for all relevant sections of WSCC to engage with CAFWS beyond just Rural Strategy and Rights of Way
 - Members could do more in promoting CAFWS, in particular to those they can advise and influence
 - LAFs should be provided with a budget from DEFRA/Government to enable them to carry out their duties.
97. Members also agreed with the comments in section 3.1 as to how DEFRA could assist Local Access Forums, subject to the addition of the comments that the work of LAFs needs to be more inclusive.
98. Members were asked to provide Ms Noble with up-to-date biographical information for the LAF website by October 31st.

Action: CAFWS Members/Jane Noble

(b) DEFRA Consultation Paper relating to the amendment of the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations

99. The Forum noted a report by the Forum Officer on current Government consultation on its proposals to amend the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002 that could help the effectiveness of forums. The object was to assist all those involved with local access forums in England by introducing greater flexibility in how appointing authorities carry out their duties, and requiring authorities to supply the Countryside Agency with basic information on their forum(s) (copy attached to the signed minutes).
100. Members concurred with the proposed responses detailed in the report, and commented on/questioned certain detailed aspects which required clarification. They also asked that the current Regulations be circulated to all members for information. These can be viewed at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2002/20021836.htm>.

101. Members were invited to submit any further thoughts they might have on the consultation to Ms Noble by 31st October 2005.

Action: CAFWS Members/Jane Noble

102. In relation to publicising the work of the Forum members asked that a standing item be placed on future agenda so that consideration could be given to any matters which would be suitable for a press release.

Action: Chris Punnett

Local Access Forum Member Training Event

103. The Chairman reported on a Countryside Agency training event which she and Mr Glynn Jones had attended the previous day when the vision of DEFRA for LAFs to have greater flexibility was outlined. Originally LAFs were conceived to provide a low-cost information bank. DEFRA was planning to raise the profile of LAFs, and after hearing its plans she was more confident that the Forum's future work would be both positive and beneficial.

Countryside Access Sub-Forums

104. Jane Noble advised members that the minutes of recent Sub-Fora meetings would soon be available on the County Council's website. She also indicated that due to resource implications the role of the Sub-Fora was likely to change. She paid tribute to the valuable work carried out by the Sub-Fora, and thanked those involved for all their hard work. A discussion paper on the future of the Sub-Fora would be submitted to the next meeting.

Action: Jane Noble

Forum Officer's Report

105. The Forum received and noted a general report on a range of issues of interest to the Forum (copy attached to the signed minutes).
106. Members noted and welcomed the generosity of the Wiston Estate in agreeing to a permissive bridleway to access a proposed underpass on the A24 near Dial Post, and asked that their thanks be recorded in the minutes.

Meeting Dates for 2006

107. The Forum noted the following meeting dates and locations for 2006:

Wednesday 22nd March at Shoreham by Sea
Wednesday 7th June at Midhurst
Wednesday 4th October at Haywards Heath
Wednesday 13th December at County Hall, Chichester

Agenda items for a future work programme for the Forum for the coming year

108. The Forum was invited to advise Jane Noble of potential topics for inclusion in the future work programme that will be discussed at the next meeting by October 31st.

Topics already noted include:

Access to water (rivers)

Access to the coast

Access to forestry/woodland

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Quiet lanes

Vehicles in the countryside

South Downs Way management

Rights of Way management (including possible site visits to bridleways and bridges)

Cycle routes – presentation by Philip King (WSCC cycle officer)

109. Glynn Jones highlighted that it was important that members do put suggestions forward and do influence the work programme rather than leaving it to WSCC Officers. As chair of the South Downs Access Forum he would welcome guidance from the CAFWS on how the SDAF could assist it in its work.

Action: CAFWS Members/Jane Noble/Chris Punnett

Date of next meeting

110. The next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum will be held on 7th December 2005 at Capron House, Midhurst.

The meeting ended at 1.25pm

Chairman