

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The West Sussex public rights of way network, comprising footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic, is a major recreational resource and forms a part of our cultural heritage. It enables people to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of large parts of the countryside to which they would not otherwise have access. Rights of way are becoming more important as they provide safe, traffic free alternatives to increasingly busy roads and lanes, which, with increases in volume and speed of traffic on them are becoming unpleasant and sometimes dangerous places for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and carriage drivers.
- 1.2 Local rights of way are used as part of everyday life for both recreation and communication needs. They are valued by the many people who use them to access services including shops, workplaces, educational and health facilities or to reach public transport. They are also treasured by many who use them for a wide range of leisure purposes including enjoying the fresh air, appreciating wildlife and the landscape, improving fitness and well-being, exploring on foot, by bike or by horse and walking the dog.
- 1.3 The location and status of public rights of way as they exist today are essentially based on historical usage, and therefore do not always reflect the access needs that people have today or are likely to have in the future. To address this, West Sussex County Council (WSCC), along with all other highway authorities, is required by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, to produce and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP).
- 1.4 In addition to the rights of way network there are a variety of other ways people can access the countryside, including using open access land and permissive routes on private land as well as that owned by public and charitable bodies. To meet the needs of a wide range of users, including walkers, cyclists and equestrians, as well as those with mobility problems, the full access network must be considered.

2 What is a Rights of Way Improvement Plan?

- 2.1 A RoWIP is a 10-year strategic document that is required to contain:
- an assessment of the extent to which the local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public
 - an assessment of the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and enjoyment
 - an assessment of the accessibility of the local rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and others with mobility problems
 - a statement of action proposed for the management of local rights of way and for securing an improved network of local rights of way, with particular regard to the matters dealt with in the assessment.
- 2.2 Section 60(5) of the CRoW Act 2000 defines 'local rights of way' as including footpaths, cycle tracks¹, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.
- 2.3 Defra's Rights of Way Improvement Plans; Statutory Guidance to Local Highway Authorities in England states that the plan should not contain information on site-specific assessments but draw broader, generic conclusions that can be used to draw up an action plan for delivery on the ground.
- 2.4 Highway authorities, such as WSCC, have a duty to consult with any Local Access Forum (LAF) established for their area before preparing their RoWIP. The CRoW Act 2000 placed a duty on each authority to set up a LAF with a wide role in advising on strategic access and recreational issues. The guidance states that the role of local access forums in relation to RoWIPs may include, for example:
- commenting on opportunities for access to open countryside especially where new linear routes may be desirable
 - assisting local highway authorities in setting priorities for implementing their plans
 - commenting on published draft plans.
- 2.5 The West Sussex RoWIP will be used to shape the future management of countryside access and to prioritise access projects throughout the county. It is important that others contribute to its delivery if real benefits are to be achieved. The County Council will work pro-actively with partners to bring about actions to improve access on foot, cycle and on horse-back despite there being no statutory duty to deliver the RoWIP. In fact projects are already being delivered on the ground by many organisations and funding and opportunities are continually being sought to deliver a better access network.

¹ Cycle tracks; in this context a cycle track means a way over which the public has the right of way on pedal cycles, with or without a right of way on foot, but does not include a way in, or by the side of, a made-up carriage way.

- 2.6 Legislation dictates that the RoWIP should be updated at least once every ten years. It also specifies that by 2010 the RoWIP should be fully integrated into the Local Transport Plan² (LTP) and guidance stresses the importance of making links between the two documents.

² Local Transport Plans are public documents that set out the highway authority's policies, strategies, objectives and targets for improving transport in their communities.

3 A Rights of Way Improvement Plan for West Sussex

3.1 Vision

A county where there are maximum opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside on foot, by horse and by bicycle for health, recreation and to access services, while recognising the need to balance this with the interests of those who live and work in the countryside and the management of special landscapes.

To realise this vision we need to: -

- Maintain the existing rights of way network to a high standard (seeking constant improvement)
- Improve path links so that the countryside is accessible directly from where people live, work and visit, to provide circular routes, and to link between communities
- Improve links to create safe routes for both leisure and utility journeys, by minimising the need to cross and use busy roads
- Provide a path network that enables appropriate access without barriers for as many people and different types of users as possible
- Promote countryside access opportunities to all sections of the community to enable people to confidently use and enjoy the countryside responsibly.

3.2 Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

- 3.2.1 The Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (the county's local access forum) has been closely involved throughout the preparation of the RoWIP. It has provided guidance on the approach taken and research methods used as well as detailed information on access issues and potential actions needed to address them.
- 3.2.2 Four Sub-forums, representing the Coastal Plain, South Downs, Low and High Weald areas of West Sussex, have supported the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex by providing local knowledge and expertise concerning access issues in their areas.

- 3.2.3 The Forum's membership is balanced between those who use the countryside for recreation, those who own and manage the land, and those with wider interests such as wildlife conservation, the landscape, heritage and working for the disabled.
- 3.2.4 The Forum will continue to play an important role advising on delivery of the plan.

3.3 Scope

- 3.3.1 The county's first RoWIP builds on 'The Milestones Statement for West Sussex' document that has been the adopted policy for delivering the rights of way service in West Sussex since it was published in February 1996. The key aim of the Milestones approach was to achieve the national target for getting rights of way legally defined, properly maintained and well publicised by the year 2000.
- 3.3.2 The West Sussex RoWIP will complement the Milestones approach by identifying the actions needed to provide a rights of way network that meets the needs of users and land managers today, as well as those anticipated of future generations.
- 3.3.3 The rights of way network is the most popular means of accessing the countryside in the county but in isolation it does not represent the full picture. There are many other areas and routes that the public can use for informal countryside access including land owned by public and charitable organisations, as well as private landowners. The road network, particularly quiet country lanes, also plays a significant role in connecting routes. All these make up the full 'countryside access network' and enable people to enjoy the heart of the Sussex countryside. The West Sussex RoWIP, although primarily focusing on the rights of way network, will also consider the whole access network.
- 3.3.4 The intention is to deliver actions to improve access arising from the plan findings where funding and resources allow. This will be in addition to current service delivery. An **Annual Action Plan** will be produced each year that will identify actions for delivery, and will also report on progress after the first year and each subsequent year. This Action Plan will be produced in partnership with stakeholders and will identify projects to be delivered by a range of organisations, in addition to the County Council. Additional resources will be sought wherever opportunities arise.
- 3.3.5 As well as detailing the vision for the future of countryside access in the county, the West Sussex RoWIP is also intended to be an informative document setting the rights of way and other countryside access within the county in context.

3.4 RoWIP methodology

- 3.4.1 Consultation and joint working have been central to the development of the West Sussex RoWIP. To better understand people's needs and aspirations for the access network both today and in the future, considerable research has been carried out towards identifying issues relating to the provision and use of the rights of way network as well as the wider countryside access network. This has been achieved by consulting widely with:
- the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex, and its four Sub-forums which provides a local focus, through meetings and workshops
 - users, land managers and the general public, via questionnaires
 - access providers through workshops and meetings (including WSCC managers responsible for countryside sites, rights of way, highways and transportation and tourism; neighbouring highway authorities; District/Borough Councils; AONB units (South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC), Chichester Harbour Conservancy (CHC), High Weald Unit); the Highways Agency; large landed estates; National Trust; Sussex Wildlife Trust; Forestry Commission)
 - Parish Councils, through a series of roadshows.
- 3.4.2 A desk study of existing relevant research, both at a national and local level, has been carried out.
- 3.4.3 The existing provision of access has been analysed and gaps in the network identified.
- 3.4.4 During preparation of the RoWIP many suggestions for specific access improvements have been identified. A significant number of these have been put forward by the Sub-forums, with others suggested by parish councils, the public and a variety of organisations. These have been scrutinised, and together with other research, have been used to develop the Statement of Action in this plan. All suggestions received, along with any that may be received in the future, are being recorded on a database that will be a valuable tool in prioritising work for inclusion in the Annual Action Plans.

3.5 Policy context

- 3.5.1 There are various plans, policies and strategies that impact on rights of way and access to the countryside. Of these the West Sussex Transport Plan 2006-2016 (the Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the county) is perhaps the most important in terms of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan; this is discussed further in paragraph 3.6. Outlined below are other significant policy documents, together with a short summary of relevant access objectives.
- 3.5.2 **South East Plan (South East England Regional Assembly)**
- Rights of way facilitating access within, to, and from the countryside
 - Reducing car use for shorter journeys
 - New routes will be multi-functional where possible.

- 3.5.3 **West Sussex County Strategy (WSCC)**
- Keeping you safe on the roads - encouraging people to travel off-road, including travel to school, work and to local services
 - Healthier communities - encouraging and giving people the opportunities to walk and cycle more
 - Protecting and enhancing our heritage and countryside.
- 3.5.4 **A Cultural Strategy for West Sussex (WSCC)**
- Improving health and well being by providing opportunities for, and encouraging, walking and cycling
 - Protecting, sustaining and promoting the county's unique environment and heritage.
- 3.5.5 **A Strategic Framework for the West Sussex Visitor Economy: Priorities and Delivery (WSCC)**
- Supporting green tourism/sustainable initiatives including walking and cycling
 - Improving the transport infrastructure for visitors
 - Improving visitor information, at planning stage and during the visit.
- 3.5.6 **Management Plans for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**
- There are three AONBs that fall partly within West Sussex: Chichester Harbour, Sussex Downs and the High Weald. Each has a management plan that includes policies on improving and promoting access for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders in particular, while retaining the character and tranquillity of the areas. As well as looking to improve opportunities for non-motorised vehicle users they also promote sustainable travel and the reduction/management of visits using cars.
 - The SDJC is aiming to complete its **Access and Recreation Strategy for the South Downs** in 2008, which will link closely with its management plan as well as the RoWIPs and LTPs of the authorities that cover the area, namely Brighton and Hove, Hampshire and East and West Sussex.
- 3.5.7 **South Downs Way National Trail Management Plan 2008 - 2013**
- The South Downs Way National Trail Management Plan 2008 - 2013 will provide a framework for the management and development of the trail, to meet the needs of users and landmanagers.
- 3.5.8 **Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) - District and Borough Councils**
- The seven District and Borough Councils within West Sussex are in various stages of producing their LDFs. They generally include the aspiration that new developments should, wherever possible, create and enhance opportunities for people to enjoy countryside recreation as well to enable sustainable travel on foot and cycle.
- 3.5.9 **Parish Plans**
- Many communities have produced Parish Plans, most of which include sections on access to the local countryside and travelling on foot and cycle around their areas.

3.5.10 **Accessible Natural Greenspace in South East England (SE AONBs, FC, NE)**

- This study identifies the availability of accessible natural greenspace (such as country parks, open woodland, access land etc) to local residents and highlights population centres where there is a lack of natural accessible greenspace.
- The results highlight the rural area between Horsham and Haywards Heath, and urban areas with Worthing as being poorly served by open space, however linear access is not considered in the report. The study will be useful in identifying areas of the county where future provision of and these areas may need to be targeted for future provision of open space may need to be targeted.

3.5.11 **Other policy documents**

There are many other policy documents that are relevant to the RoWIP that have been consulted during its preparation and these, in addition to those mentioned above, are listed in Appendix A.

3.6 The West Sussex Transport Plan 2006 - 2016

3.6.1 The West Sussex Transport Plan sets out a clear long-term vision for transport in the county for the period from 2006 to 2016. The West Sussex RoWIP will contribute towards this vision and will in due course form a distinct strand of the LTP. The statutory guidance for both LTPs and RoWIPs stresses the importance of making links between the two documents and the current published LTP, includes a RoWIP progress update, and its future annual reports will include further updates on the RoWIP and its delivery. It is a legal requirement that a RoWIP is reviewed at least every 10 years, and it is intended that the timing of the first review of the RoWIP will coincide with the review of the West Sussex Transport Plan, and that this will be the time to achieve full integration.

3.6.2 The shared priorities for transport, as identified in the LTP, are:

- delivering better accessibility to services and improving public transport, in particular bus services
- achieving safer roads
- reducing pollution
- tackling congestion.

Minimising car use and promoting alternatives is a major theme of the West Sussex Transport Plan.

All these can to some extent be addressed by delivering a more user-friendly, needs based rights of way and wider countryside access network that provides for people walking, cycling and horse riding for leisure or utility purposes. The rights of way network already plays a significant role in achieving a better quality of life for residents of the county, particularly by improving physical health and general well-being, allowing people to both reduce and avoid traffic congestion and pollution.

- 3.6.3 The LTP may provide one way of bidding for funding for delivery of the RoWIP from central government, however funding through the LTP process cannot be guaranteed. There may be opportunities where some projects that deliver actions identified in the RoWIP Annual Action Plans that share common aims with the LTP can be delivered directly through the LTP team or, funding may become available to deliver RoWIP projects separately.
- 3.6.4 There are three main supporting documents to the LTP that will contribute to making strong and robust links between the LTP and the RoWIP. These are *Stepping Ahead*, *Peddling Ahead* and the *Accessibility Strategy* (see sections 3.6.8 to 3.6.10).
- 3.6.5 The LTP and associated documents have historically tended to concentrate on the needs of users for utility purposes, such as routes to school, to shopping areas and to work, often focussing on the road network and associated footways with little thought of other routes people may use for recreation, although this is changing.
- 3.6.6 In many places the rights of way network, together with other routes through the countryside or open spaces, will play a vital role in delivering the aims and objectives of the Local Transport Plan.

3.6.7 Stepping Ahead in West Sussex

- 3.6.7.1 *Stepping Ahead* is WSCC's strategy for walking. It is currently in the process of being revised and officers responsible for the RoWIP, as well as the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex, are being consulted at all stages of the process. The revised document will consider the needs of users for both recreational and utility journeys and will provide a strong link between the LTP and RoWIP.
- 3.6.7.2 The aims and objectives anticipated to be in the revised document include:
- promoting walking as an alternative form of transport
 - making services and facilities more accessible (including through school and work Travel Plans)
 - encouraging people to walk more for their health and wellbeing
 - considering the needs of pedestrians in new developments
 - increasing the quality of experience for pedestrians
 - creating a safe environment for pedestrians
 - publicising and promoting walking
 - increasing walking for utility and recreation
 - improving town to countryside access to reduce the need for people to drive to countryside further afield.

3.6.8 Pedalling Ahead

- 3.6.8.1 *Pedalling Ahead* is the County Council's cycling strategy and sets out how the Council will work towards ensuring that cycling is promoted as a realistic alternative to motor transport. Principle aims and objectives include:
- making cycling more attractive
 - promoting cycling as normal and acceptable behaviour in West Sussex

- providing cycle networks, including the National Cycling Network, to increase safety for cyclists
- promoting the health benefits of cycling
- working with organisations such as public transport operators to improve integration between modes of transport
- developing Safer Routes to School initiatives
- ensuring that new developments promote cycling and all are accessible by cycle
- promoting cycling as part of the TravelWise initiative and travel plan development
- promoting road user safety
- reducing road casualties.

3.6.8.2 Policies for cycling using the road network and cycle tracks/ways are well developed within the LTP framework and therefore the RoWIP will concentrate mainly on off-road riding for recreational, leisure and utility purposes.

3.6.9 Accessibility Strategy

3.6.9.1 West Sussex's Accessibility Strategy, in line with government guidelines, focuses on access to education, health care, food shops and to work. Amongst other issues considered, the Strategy looks at:

- getting to services at a reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease
- accessing services within reasonable distance
- getting to and from services safely

3.6.9.2 The Strategy also looks at how public transport can be improved to make services more accessible, in particular bus services

3.6.9.3 As with all aspects of delivering the LTP, partnership working is essential to successful implementation of the accessibility strategy. District and Borough Councils, in particular, are key partners.

3.7 Characteristics of the County

3.7.1 Four management areas, based broadly on landscape characteristics, are referred to throughout this plan: the Coastal Plain, the South Downs (which covers the Sussex Downs AONB within West Sussex), the Low Weald and the High Weald. Figure 1 shows these areas, along with the major settlements in the county and the neighbouring highway authority areas. The characteristics of these areas are covered later on in the chapter.

3.7.2 The county of West Sussex is predominantly rural in nature, covers nearly 2,000 square kilometres (1,250 square miles) and has a population of over 750,000. More than half of the county is farmland and nearly a fifth is woodland, making it one of the most heavily wooded counties in the country.

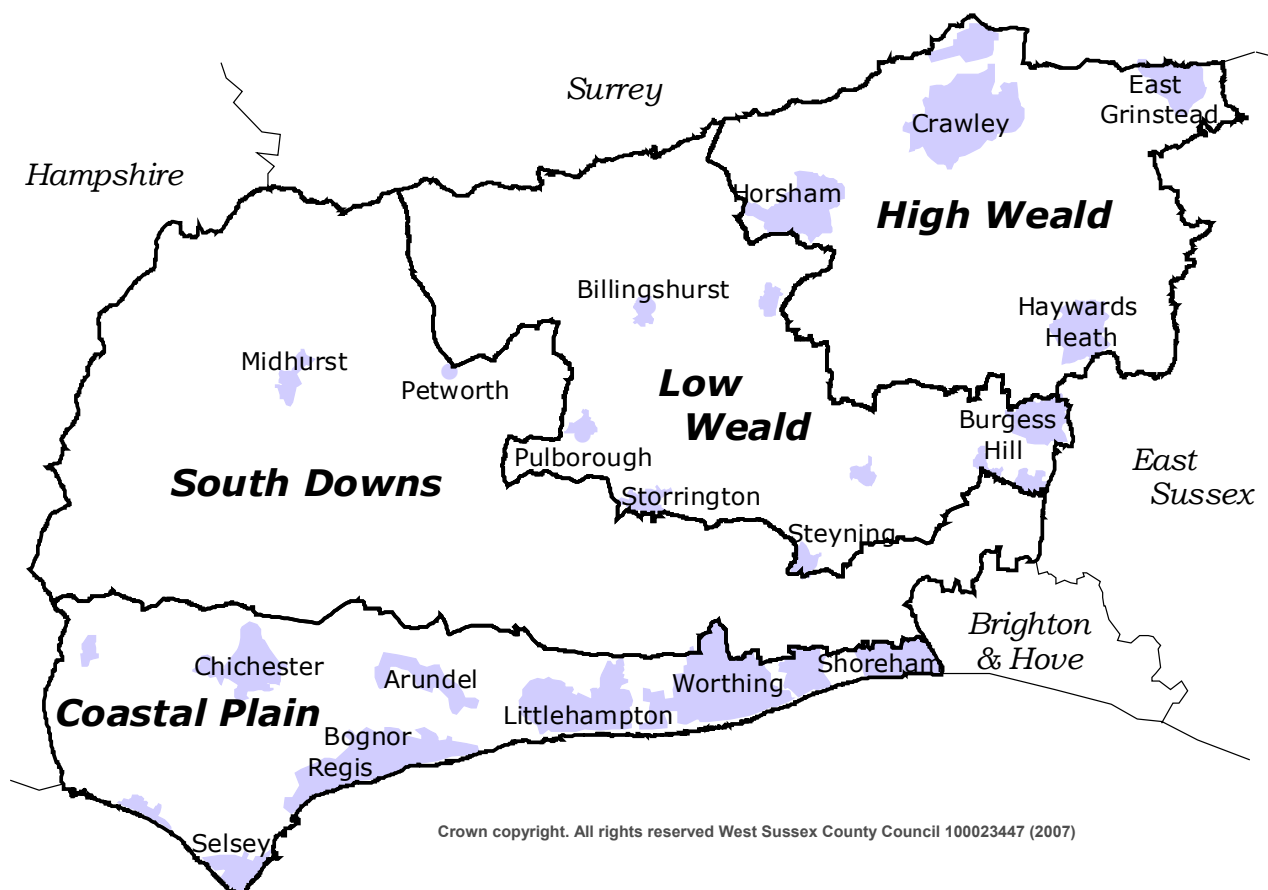


Figure 1. Landscape areas, settlements and neighbouring highway authorities

- 3.7.3 Such is the quality of the countryside and landscape that over half of the county is designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), namely Chichester Harbour, the Sussex Downs and the High Weald. There are also 3 country parks, over 50 nature reserves and 82 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- 3.7.4 The Government is working towards creating a new National Park for the South Downs (primarily encompassing the East Hampshire and the Sussex Downs AONBs). The process of designation began in 2000 although, as yet, a final decision is still to be taken.
- 3.7.5 The population of West Sussex is centred in the main towns of Horsham, Crawley, East Grinstead and Burgess Hill in the north and east of the county, and Chichester, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing and Shoreham along the south coast. Elsewhere, in the rural heartland of the county, there is a scattering of small towns and villages.
- 3.7.6 Census data shows that 94% of the population in West Sussex describe themselves as white British and that only 3.4% are non-white. Crawley and Worthing are home to the main concentrations of ethnic minorities.
- 3.7.7 20% of the population in West Sussex is aged 65 and over. In line with national trends the average age is rising as people are living longer and, as a result, the number of older people is expected to rise significantly over the next 10 years. This is likely to have an impact on how people want to access

the countryside (the expectation is that people will have more time but less mobility) and therefore the management required to meet their needs.

- 3.7.8 As stated in the South East Local Plan (submitted to government in March 2006) 58,000 new homes are scheduled to be built in West Sussex between 2006 and 2026. Although exact sites and locations are still being identified, strategic development is likely to be concentrated in the north east (around Crawley, East Grinstead and Horsham) and in the south of the county (around Chichester and west of the River Arun).
- 3.7.9 An extensive network of public rights of way gives access throughout the county, ranging through the sandstone hills of the High Weald, across the patchwork of pasture and woodland that makes up the Low Weald, and over the rolling Sussex Downs to the Coastal Plain, with its wooded harbours and open beaches.
- 3.7.10 The county is dissected by a number of main roads, notably the M23, A23, A24, A29, A285 and A286 which all run north south, and the A272 and A27 which traverse the county east west. These are linked by a network of other A and B roads and increasingly busy C roads. With a steady growth in the amount and speed of traffic using the road network, West Sussex, like much of the South East, has a problem with congestion. Many of the once quiet country lanes are being used increasingly by motorised vehicles.

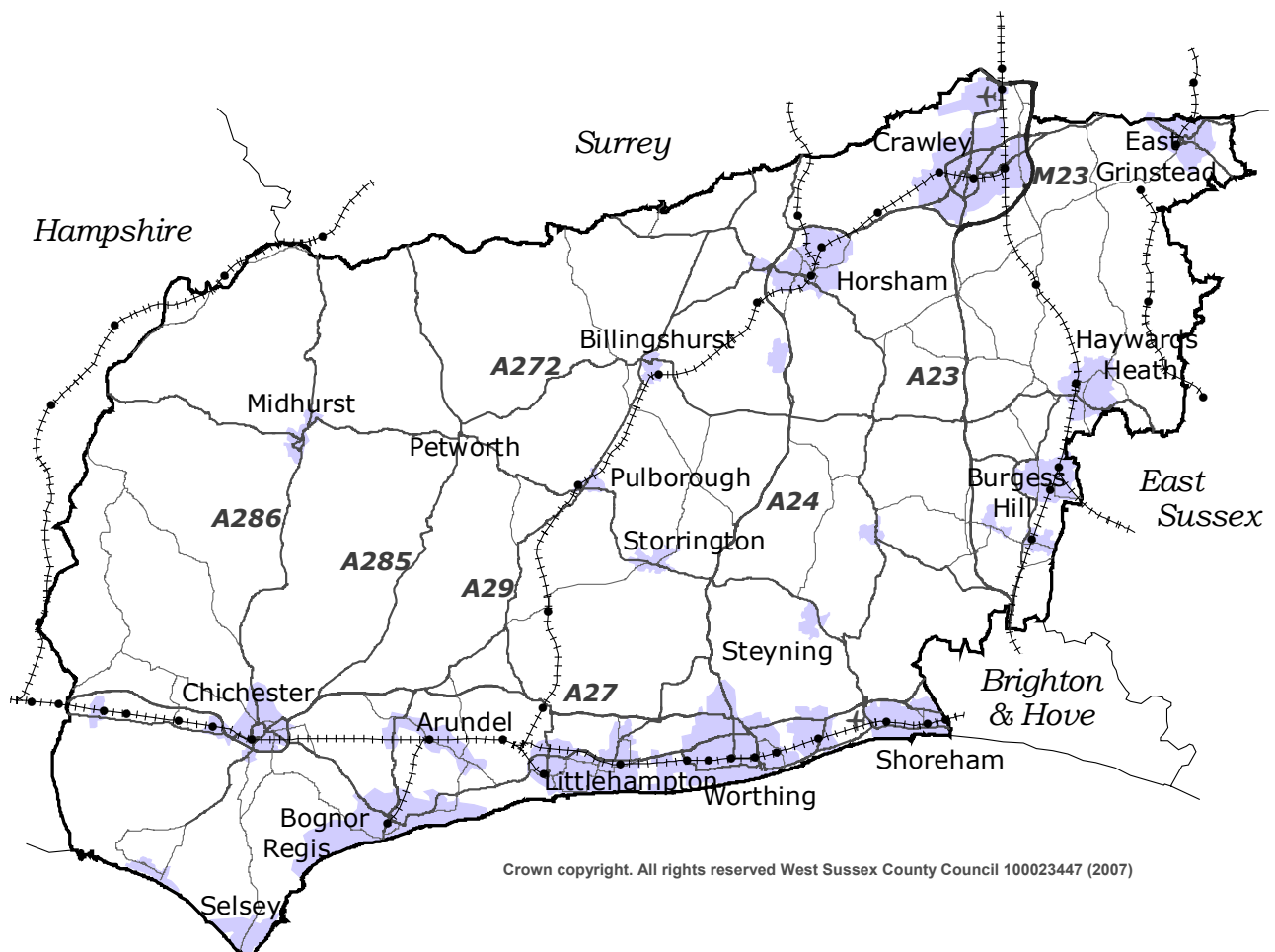


Figure 2. Main roads, railways and airports

- 3.7.11 West Sussex is reasonably served by trains, with routes running across the whole county and good links to London. There are also a number of bus services providing for both urban and rural communities. It has one of the country's major international airports at Gatwick, north of Crawley.

3.8 Characteristics of the four management areas

3.8.1 Coastal Plain

- 3.8.1.1 The Coastal Plain is characterised by its flat open landscape and large coastal towns of Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing and Shoreham and city of Chichester, all linked by the A27 corridor.
- 3.8.1.2 It is a diverse landscape of inlets and harbours, narrow tidal creeks, mudflats, dunes, shingle beaches, grazing marshes and paddocks. Chichester Harbour AONB and Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve are worthy of special note for their international wildlife importance. Arable fields, defined by low hedgerows, are often interspersed by horticultural glasshouse 'estates' and paddocks. Trees are not a dominant feature - there are some small woods and a few windswept individual trees in the farmland or the occasional poplar shelter belt. From the Downs and Coastal Plain edge there are long views towards the sea and the Isle of Wight beyond.
- 3.8.1.3 Being home to many people there is a great demand on the access network for recreation and utility needs, though the paths are mainly footpaths, so there are very limited opportunities for users other than walkers. The roads are busy and, despite the flat terrain, off-road cycling or horse-riding opportunities are very limited. The soils are predominately alluvial deposits over gravel, with occasional pockets of clay and sand. The lowest areas are often seasonally waterlogged.

3.8.2 South Downs

- 3.8.2.1 The West Sussex area of the Sussex Downs AONB is characterised by two distinctive landscapes – the chalk ridge that cuts across the full width of the county and beyond, and the greensand belt in the north west of the county. Both areas are lightly settled with scattered villages and hamlets, with higher concentrations of people in the towns of Midhurst and Petworth.
- 3.8.2.2 The prominent chalk outcrop, which rises gently from the Coastal Plain in the south and has a dramatic north-facing scarp, is topped by rolling arable fields and close-cropped grassland. Woodlands, both coniferous and broadleaf, are a distinctive feature of the western Downs as are large estates. Further east there are fewer trees and hedgerows and the River Adur cuts through the Downs with its alluvial floodplains - a contrast to the dry uplands.
- 3.8.2.3 Roman roads and drove roads are common and characteristic along the whole Downs ridge and form the basis of the extensive rights of way network which offers excellent opportunities for walkers, riders, cyclists and, to a lesser extent for carriage drivers and those carrying out other outdoor activities. There is generally good drainage on the Downs so the rights of way network does not suffer from the waterlogged surface conditions experienced elsewhere in the county, although there are some pockets of clay overlying

the chalk that cause localised problems. The exposed chalk does become very slippery when wet, creating problems for all users.

- 3.8.2.4 The Downs are the most popular destination in the county for outdoor recreation for both local people and visitors. In West Sussex there are a number of 'honey-pot' sites, including Chanctonbury Ring and Devil's Dyke.
- 3.8.2.5 It is likely that if National Park status is achieved it will bring additional pressures for access and recreation management and may require a different approach to rights of way improvement planning.
- 3.8.2.6 The Wealden Greensand area, in the north west of the Sussex Downs, is a mosaic of extensive belts of ancient mixed woodland together with more recent coniferous plantations, open heath, rough grazing and river valleys.
- 3.8.2.7 The geology is complex with well-drained sandy heaths contrasting with the heavy soils of the River Rother valley. The scattered settlements are linked by deep, overhanging, winding lanes and are generally quieter than other areas of the county.

3.8.3 Low Weald

- 3.8.3.1 The Low Weald is the low-lying clay landscape found between the chalk of the South Downs, the higher sandstone areas of the Surrey Hills and the High Weald to the north and east.
- 3.8.3.2 Its small-scale intimate landscape includes an intricate mix of small woodlands, patchwork fields, tall hedgerows and small stream valleys with wet woodlands. The settlements are generally small and scattered.
- 3.8.3.3 The Low Weald has the highest concentration of rights of way in the county but they, in particular the bridleways, suffer from poor drainage conditions due to the heavy clay soils. Connectivity and severance of the access network by roads is a problem in the Low Weald as it is elsewhere in the county.

3.8.4 High Weald

- 3.8.4.1 The High Weald is a landscape of rolling hills incised by deep valleys covered by small irregular fields, abundant ancient woodland and hedges. The area is further enriched by locally and nationally important features including sandstone outcrops, historic gardens, deer parks and veteran trees. Large reservoirs are significant features within the High Weald landscape adding to the area's interest and variety.
- 3.8.4.2 Main roads and settlements are sited along the prominent ridge-lines with a dense network of small, narrow, and winding lanes linking scattered villages, hamlets and farms. The urban settlements associated with Gatwick Airport and the large town of Crawley contrast with the rural character of the rest of the area. The soils are predominately clay leading to some surface issues on rights of way. There are several large developments proposed for this area, which may alter the character of parts of the High Weald.