

Agenda Item 3

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at Capron House, Midhurst on 18th April 2007.

Present:

Mrs R Perrin (Chairman)

Mrs H Baldwin
Mr P Brown
Mrs A Janes
Mr D Ribbens

Miss J Beuzeval
Mr D Deedman
Mr G Jones
Mr N Sloan

Mr P Belden
Mr S Evans
Mr T Passmore
Mrs S Wright

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Officers: Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Christine Luff, Jane Noble, Fiona MacLeod

Also attending – Louise Goldsmith, WSCC Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy

Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

1. The Secretary advised that Mrs Perrin was happy to stand for re-election as Chairman for a third and final year. A proposal was received from Trevor Passmore, seconded by Glynn Jones and agreed by the Forum.
2. **Resolved: that Mrs Perrin be appointed as Chairman for the coming year.**
3. The Secretary advised that Peter Brown was happy to stand for re-election as Vice Chairman. A proposal was received from Mrs Perrin, seconded by David Ribbens and unanimously agreed by the Forum.
4. **Resolved: that Peter Brown be appointed as Vice Chairman for the coming year.**
5. The Secretary referred to a letter received from Ted White concerning the election of a Chairman. He asked that it be recorded in his absence that Mrs Perrin should not stand for election as she had been Chairman since the Forum started in 2003 i.e. more than the 3 years allowed. The Secretary informed members that this was inaccurate as Ian Elliott had been the first Chairman appointed by the Forum and Mrs Perrin had just completed her second year as Chairman.
6. He further stated that proxy voting should be available and he would have voted for Peter Brown to be Chairman. The Secretary pointed out that proxy voting is not allowed.

Apologies:-

7. Apologies for absence were received from Bill Acraman, Jason Emrich, Marion Gue, Ted White, and David Whyberd.

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Welcome

8. The Chairman welcomed the observers and members of the public to the meeting. Ms Goldsmith will be joining the meeting at 11am and as a result the order of the meeting may change.

Declarations of Interest

9. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

10. **Resolved: That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on 24th January 2007 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.**

Matters arising

11. **Minute 174** – The Secretary confirmed that contact had been made with East Sussex County Council regarding their volunteer programme and this would be considered as a possible topic for a future themed meeting.

Urgent Matters

12. The Chairman informed members that Roy Bidwell had recently resigned from the Forum. As a result, there is a need to recruit another member to represent cycling interests. Members suggested contacting Chris Boocock, Sustrans, and Mike Croker, cycling forum, for potential nominations.
13. **Resolved: Secretary to seek nominations for cycling interest representation.**

South Downs Access Forum (SDAF) update

14. Glynn Jones updated members on the meeting held on 13th April, which was not very well attended.
15. The consultation on the power for National Park Authorities (NPAs) to make Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) was discussed in detail. CAFWS, along with the three other Mother Forums of the SDAF, had asked SDAF to draft a response. A key point identified was the lack of any consultations on temporary TROs.
16. A presentation was received from Dora Pilkington, (Toll Rides (Off-Road) Trust (TROT)) on their scheme where riders pay for permissive access and the farmers/landowners get paid to provide it.

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17. Trevor Passmore informed members that farmers would be responsible for maintaining tracks in this instance. Defra's Environmental Stewardship Scheme allows for payments for permissive access for horse riders, as well as walkers, and should be encouraged where appropriate.
18. Toll routes and permissive horse access on land over public footpaths with vulnerable soils can result in heavy churning. Christine Luff confirmed that although the responsibility for ensuring permitted users do not cause damage to disadvantage statutory users lies with the landowner, it is possible that the County Council could consider making a contribution towards remedial work in certain circumstances.
19. Tricia Butcher, as an observer and Chairman of the High Weald Sub Forum, highlighted that toll rides can serve a useful purpose by providing riding opportunities in areas where the riding network is incomplete and fragmented, but it must be remembered that they are only permissive. It is important that more permanent solutions are sought including providing new definitive riding routes.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) Funding and the WSCC Fundamental Service Review (FSR)

20. The Chairman welcomed Louise Goldsmith to the meeting and reminded members that letters had been written to both Ms Goldsmith and Kieran Stigant, Director for Environment & Development (E&D) expressing Forum concerns as a result of phase 1 of the FSR.
21. Ms Goldsmith described how the FSR had produced both negative and positive outcomes such as the need to make substantial savings of £15 million whilst at the same time providing the opportunity to review how resources are managed for the future.
22. She took a personal interest in coast and countryside matters and believed strongly in recreational access and the rights of way network, which, although well maintained, she felt was under utilised. Education of the public in learning and understanding about the countryside and its impact on the environment was a key topic. An example given was the launch of the Literary Trail on April 6th which attracted nearly 100 walkers.
23. Budgets were discussed and as Cabinet Member, she had fought hard to secure funding of £300,000 for capital works to improve the RoW network, confirming WSCC's commitment to this area. Partnership working with CAFWS will continue this commitment.
24. The Chairman updated members on the invitation to attend the Officers Joint Advisory Group on Strategy (OffJAGS), a planning group of county and district planning officers, on 18th May.

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25. The Forum would be involved with planning at a very early stage and could influence the ways in which access is provided. An example given was the design of Milton Keynes, which had access routes designed and established so that people could safely and comfortably visit the countryside from within the urban areas.
26. The Q&A session with Ms Goldsmith is summarised below:-
- **Q** - an application for the creation of a new footpath at Chaites Farm near the A23 at Bolney was refused, against the officers' recommendation, by the Rights of Way (ROW) Committee in February 2007. Concerns were raised that new rights of way would now only be approved if 'overwhelming need' was demonstrated. Press articles also referred to this decision
 - **A** – Ms Goldsmith had been unable to contact the Chairman of the ROW Committee prior to the Forum meeting. However, she would like to see if something could be done about the decision and would like it reviewed. Members were reminded that the ROW Committee was quasi-judicial.
 - **Q** – how does the new reorganisation within E&D affect partnership working with this and other forums and similar groups.
 - **A** – partnership working will still be key in delivering services and listening to forums suggestions and concerns
 - **Q** – there is an ongoing issue with housing requirements in West Sussex from Government. What impact will this have on footpaths etc and how can this be addressed
 - **A** – housing requirements are a big concern to WSCC particularly from an infrastructure viewpoint, and the Council will continue to make representations. Where development does take place we will work in partnership with the Forum to ensure the best possible outcome for walkers and riders
 - **Q** – urban footpaths are still included in the ROW budgets, however WSCC are looking to transfer responsibility for these to the Highways Department. Will there be funding available when this happens
 - **A** - this is currently being looked at. The Chairman clarified that there are no direct funds available from the Highways Department Local Transport Plan (LTP) for implementation of the RoWIP. Lisa Creaye-Griffin pointed out that although this is true, some RoWIP projects are being delivered through the LTP such as the new cycle route between Barnham and Bognor
 - **Q** - Highways are keen on tarmac surfaces which is not conducive for horse riding. Also cycling is a means of sustainable transport but again must have a suitable riding surface. A balance needs to be struck to provide surfaces that meet the needs of all users. how can we ensure this happens
 - **A** – this will be taken up with E&D. Surfacing material should equate to the path's use. As an example, an option for consideration might be Fittleworth stone. Glynn Jones commented that local geology needs to be considered, and limestone would be better to use the Downs than Fittleworth stone.

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- **Q** – will ‘honeypots’ attract more people whilst leaving other areas more quiet
- **A** – a balanced approach is needed to encourage people away from such ‘honeypots’ to avoid environmental damage and persuade them to visit other routes and places
- **Q** – what will be done to alleviate concerns and cynicism regarding the lack of any requirement to actually deliver initiatives identified in the RoWIP. It was suggested that walks for health could justify/attract funding by looking at the broader picture regarding access benefits. Lack of funding also applies to the Coastal Defences Plan as there is no funding allocated for action. It is also important that funding is sought from other areas such as parish and district councils.
- **A** – reassurances were given on personal commitment towards the RoWIP deliverables and that there will be a real prospect of funding opportunities.

27. The Chairman and members thanked Ms Goldsmith for attending the Forum meeting and for taking the time to answer their questions. The Chairman expressed her reassurance concerning the ongoing commitment of WSCC to the Forum.

Coastal Plain Sub Forum

28. Members noted the minutes of the Sub Forum meeting held 8th March 2007.
29. The Vice Chairman had also welcomed Chris Boocock, Sustrans, to the Sub-Forum in place of Liz Beth.
30. He confirmed that the main focus of the meeting had been the Coastal Defence Strategy consultation, resulting in the response sent to Defra and made available to CAFWS members. In essence, the Strategy is engineering focused and there is nothing in the brief to look at public access. However, the Access to the Coast consultation is expected in May and there does not appear to have been any ‘joined up thinking’ between the two consultations.
31. Glynn Jones highlighted that a new and different threat to the coastline is the start of climate change and that traditional approaches outlined in the Strategy may no longer be valid. It has to be accepted that we cannot keep saving the coastline by, for example, managed retreat. Funding for more sustainable approaches should be campaigned for. Trevor Passmore advised that this topic was on the Agenda for a meeting with the Environment Agency in his capacity as a member of the Regional Fisheries, Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee.

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32. Ann Janes commented that, following a lengthy debate, the decision on coastal defences made by Chichester District Council was that the line should be held for the time being i.e. no definite decision to be made until all other responses and information had been received. The proposed level of house building in the areas identified would need different strategies to be adopted. In addition, coastal access would prove very costly and difficult to implement. There is no right of access to coastal defences and changes to the law will be needed.

Strategic New Developments – District Council Process

33. The Vice Chairman was pleased to report that the Forum would in future be in early contact with district councils on the planning process. It is likely that working groups volunteered from Forum or Sub Forum members would be set up for new developments, adopting a similar approach to the working group covering the East Grinstead development.

Disabled Access Working Group

34. David Ribbens advised that the working group had learned a lot from their initial meeting to agree a work plan and this had proved an excellent base on which to start the group.
35. Members were invited to input their ideas to steer the group. It was suggested that the focus should be on where access is most needed and who the client base should be. The outline Project Brief provided by the Vice Chairman will be used.
36. The South Downs Way bridge was given as an example of a high cost wheelchair access project costing £500,000. Care must be taken to ensure that allocated funding for access is not all taken up by one project.
37. Jane Noble will provide student contact details from Plumpton College to assist with the final report of the Working Group.

East Grinstead Development Working Group

38. The Working Party has still to be formally set up. Tricia Butcher had made contact with Ian Moody, Strategic Planning, Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) who welcomed the Forum's early involvement in the planning process.
39. The May 2006 MSDC Issues and Options paper had been under analysis and the Preferred Options will be put to their Committee in June. This will form the basis of the Submission Document issued in September, followed by public consultation in October. The Working Group will review and comment on the documentation.
40. Two new developments had been identified at Horsham and to the north west of Crawley. Nigel Sloan agreed to co-ordinate activities on the Horsham development, with input from Richard Mercer, High Weald Sub Forum. The Crawley development is for 2500 houses and will be included in the Area Action Plan due September/October 2007, with Submission expected April 2008.

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Cycling Working Group

41. Discussions took place regarding cycling in the countryside and a new working group covering off road cycling was formed at the meeting. Glynn Jones will co-ordinate the group and Nigel Sloan, Ann Janes and Chris Boocock (Coastal Plain Sub Forum), volunteered to assist. The new South Downs Way Officer, once in post, will also be invited to join.
42. Members commented that whilst the promotion of cycling in the countryside had been very successful, there were groups such as mountain bikers that should be targeted for education. Chris Boocock, Sustrans, advised that cyclist education was a priority for his organisation.

Revised Local Access Forum (LAF) Regulations and Guidelines

43. Members were pleased to note the new Regulations and Guidelines had taken on board all the comments from the Forum and other LAFs. More power had been given to LAFs and clarity provided regarding provision of advice and the requirements to consult or notify forums.
44. The brief for LAFs is now much wider and joined up, and will enable the Forum to have an enhanced impact on access matters, including utilities access. Additional Section 94(4) statutory bodies (bodies to which Forums give advice) are:
 - Sport England (the English Sports Council)
 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Conservation Boards
 - Parish councils
 - Town councils

Consultations

45. Members noted the responses already made on various consultations.
 - Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy – A response was sent on behalf of CAFWS by the Coastal Plain Sub Forum (see minute 30)
 - Power for National Park Authorities to make Traffic Regulation Orders – CAFWS noted response drafted by SDAF and additionally noted that the National Farmers Union is not identified as a consultee for TRO's in National Parks. The CAFWS response will be amended to suggest it should be. It was noted that the County Council had also sent a detailed response to the consultation.
 - Access to the Coast is expected to be a major consultation and will initially be reviewed by the Coastal Plain Sub Forum. Forum member input will be appreciated. The consultation is due for release in May and will last for 12 weeks
 - The consultation on landowner/occupier right to apply for order to divert/extinguish a public right of way is expected in May and will be made available to members for comment

2006/2007 CAFWS Annual Report

46. Members reviewed the draft Report at the meeting (copy attached to signed minutes). Additional comments and photographs to be provided to

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Jane Noble by 23rd April.

Rural Strategy for West Sussex

47. Lisa Creaye-Griffin updated members that the West Sussex Rural Forum that met twice yearly had been put on hold and a Rural Partnership (RP) set up. The Partnership will look at holistic and strategic issues and will liaise with CAFWS where appropriate.
48. The RP is currently preparing a 10-20 year Rural Strategy for West Sussex and external consultants have already completed draft documentation covering social, economic, countryside and environment elements. Flora and fauna are included.
49. A stakeholder consultation workshop will take place at Billingshurst Village Hall on 13 June 2007 to which CAFWS representatives will be invited.

General Report

50. The Forum noted a General Report on a range of issues and interest to the Forum (copy attached to the signed minutes).

Agenda Items for Consideration for the Next Meeting of the Forum

51. The following items were suggested for consideration: -
 - Theme of meeting to be woodland access with talks by Jason Emrich, and Fiona Reid from the Forestry Commission
 - Access to the coast – review of consultation and suggested response for Forum agreement
 - Access to inland water, if appropriate

Matters for Information

52. Members had no additional information of interest to the Forum.

Date of Next Meeting

53. The next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum will be held at 10.30am on Wednesday 18th July at The Bothy, Knepp Castle, near Horsham.

The meeting ended at 12.35pm.

Chairman