

## Agenda Item 3

### Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at The Bothy, Knepp Castle on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

#### Present:

Mrs R Perrin (Chairman)

Mrs B Acraman	Mrs H Baldwin	Mr P Brown
Mrs T Butcher	Mr D Deedman	Mr J Emrich
Mr S Evans	Mrs A Janes	Mr G Jones
Mr T Passmore	Mr D Ribbens	Mr N Sloan
Mr T White	Mr D Whyberd	Mrs S Wright

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

#### Apologies:-

54. Apologies for absence were received from Derek Deedman and Marion Gue.

#### Welcome

55. The Chairman welcomed the ten observers and members of the public to the meeting.
56. The Chairman introduced a new member of the Forum, Mrs T Butcher, who gave a brief resume of her interests and background, including chairmanship of the High Weald Sub Forum.

#### Declarations of Interest

57. There were no declarations of interest.

#### Minutes

58. Minute 31 – wording changed to read ‘traditional methods and alternative methods, such as retreat’ in second sentence.
59. Minute 32 – wording added to read ‘across private property’ in final sentence.
60. Minute 40 – Richard Mercer is involved with the East Grinstead development, not Horsham.
61. **Resolved: That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.**

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### Matters arising

62. **Minute 13** – The Secretary confirmed that two applications had been received for cycling interest representation on the Forum and are being evaluated.
63. **Minute 36** – Jane Noble clarified that the cost for the St Botolph bridge referred to in the Minute was expected to be between £20,000 and £50,000, not £500,000 as quoted. The bridge will also benefit cyclists and walkers. Mr Passmore added that he had been told work would commence in June 2007.

### Urgent Matters

64. The Chairman informed members that Julia Beuzeval had recently resigned from the Forum for personal reasons.
65. **Resolved: Secretary to write accepting the resignation.**

As the speaker from the Forestry Commission had been called out on an urgent matter, the Forum agreed to defer the presentations until later in the meeting.

### CAFWS Annual Report

66. Copies of the 2006/2007 Annual Report were handed out to members to circulate in their organisations/groups where appropriate.
67. The Chairman thanked Jane Noble and Fiona MacLeod for their work on the Report.

### West Sussex Rural Strategy – Stakeholder Consultation Exercise

68. Lisa Creaye-Griffin updated members that the Draft Rural Strategy consultation runs from 13 June to 5 September. Peter Brown attended the stakeholder workshop meeting on 13 June on behalf of the Forum, and some other CAFWS members attended representing other organisations.
69. With the help of county partnerships, the strategy will identify funding, prioritise needs and, as a result, be able to influence national policy.
70. The Action Plan to deliver the strategy had been initiated and rural stakeholder involvement will be aimed at parish council and similar organisation level, rather than an individual level.
71. Peter Brown highlighted the accessibility ambitions of Aim 3, and in particular Objective 14 for members' benefit, and pointed out that although the rights of way network is included in the Action Plan, no mention had been made of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP).
72. The Chairman encouraged members to involve their organisations on the consultation.

### Strategic Developments

73. Members noted the letter sent to district and borough councils.
74. Mr Acraman recommended sending a similar letter to the leaders of the seven local councils and their cabinet members for the environment to further raise the profile of CAFWS.
75. **Resolved – Secretary to send letters and enclose copies of the Annual Report**
76. As a result of attending the Officers Joint Advisory Group on Strategy (Ofjags) to raise the profile of CAFWS, the Chairman had been to a meeting at Mid Sussex District Council with Judith Hewitt, Development Planning.
77. The Chairman had suggested that a 'broad brush' approach be used for wider access, highlighting the use of multi-user routes to provide access for health as well as recreation.

### Working Groups:

#### Disability Access

78. Members reviewed the report from the Working Group, and Jane Noble was thanked for her support at the meeting.
79. Mr Passmore highlighted the issue he had with a recently installed disabled toilet and shower where a Radar key was not allowed as access and use was also by able-bodied people. This meant that disabled users had to contact him to obtain the key. The Working Group will investigate.
80. The Working Group will look at the option of sending an access questionnaire to disabled groups.
81. Mr Acraman confirmed that wheelchairs can be used on the two recycled plastic boardwalks at Pagham Beach. It was suggested that similar boardwalks could be used in woodland near Standen House and a grant requested from the local County Local Committee (CLC).

#### East Grinstead Strategic Development

82. Members noted the letter to Mid Sussex District Council regarding the development. Tricia Butcher outlined the next steps with the Preferred Option going to the District Council on 25 July followed by public consultations in November and December 2007.
83. One response had been received to an advert in the press to co-opt experts to the Working Group.

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84. CAFWS will also be involved in developments scheduled for Broadbridge Heath and north west of Crawley during consultation in November 2007. WSCC will fund the cost of hard copies of the documentation for use by CAFWS and its Working Group.
85. A copy of a consultation on Development Control Issues and Options had been received from Crawley Borough Council for review and any response will be sent via the Forum Secretary.
86. It was mentioned that Chichester District Council's (CDC) Core Strategy had been found to be unsound by the Planning Inspector and therefore had been withdrawn. The CDC's Executive Board will consider it in September 2007.

#### **South Downs Access Forum (SDAF)**

87. Members noted the minutes of the meeting held 12<sup>th</sup> April 2007 and received a verbal update from Glynn Jones on the meeting held 29<sup>th</sup> June.
88. SDAF members had been updated on the current financial constraints with SDJC and asked to reduce the number of meetings held and assess subsequent support impact.
89. Interpretation signage, coastal access and Graffham Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) were discussed and an update given on the Open Access project.
90. **Resolved: Secretary to add SDAF members to CAFWS minutes circulation list.**

It was agreed that as the Forestry Commission speaker had not arrived, the meeting should revert to Agenda Items 6a and 6b

91. Members received a presentation from Jason Emrich on the **Knepp Castle Estate** with key points as follows:
  - the Estate has a duty to maintain 16.5 miles of rights of way, however this causes a conflict between conservation aspirations and public access eg the wild horses exist alongside domestic riders
  - the catalyst for the change to a conservation culture on the Estate had been the fall in commodity prices
  - inspiration for the scheme came from Holland
  - Countryside Stewardship took off in 2001 with the introduction of fallow deer and crossed ownership boundaries with neighbouring landowners
  - there are Exmoor ponies, Tamworth pigs and long horn cattle roaming freely in the wild on the Estate with their young
  - the animals are 'free roaming' and not just 'grazing tools'
  - ragwort is an ongoing problem on the Estate as, although it is controlled, it is dangerous to the horses and cattle
  - a river restoration project is being planned which will include the restoration of the flood plain and meanders. The footpath that crosses the area is likely to be affected, with possible flooding during the winter

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- an eco-bridge is also planned as a long term future project and there is the potential to introduce otters at a later stage
  - The family in residence are happy to use the Estate for conservation management
92. Members comments are summarised as follows:
- encouraged to see ambitious conservation plans and appreciated the potential conflict with access users
  - consultation with user groups key for any initiative affecting public access
  - there could be more sympathetic and constructive solutions on access between local authorities and the Estate by way of round table discussions
  - floodplain footpaths on stilts should be considered, although it was appreciated this would be very expensive
  - there are plans for a potential larger scale flood plain at the sea end of the River Arun at Littlehampton
93. The Forum agreed that the work being undertaken on the Estate should be fully supported.
94. Members received a presentation from Glynn Jones on the **Slindon Estate**. The Forum was reminded that, as he had retired from the National Trust (NT) in March 2007, the views expressed were purely personal and were not representative of the NT.
95. The key points were as follows:
- access delivery is inconsistent, especially in woodland areas
  - there is no 'access champion' and it would be beneficial for CAFWS to encourage the NT to make use of a regional champion in partnership with the Forum
  - publishing and mapping of 'open access' could be improved
  - gaps in routes should be identified and new bridleways considered for dedicated as a result
  - zoning in Slindon Park does not allow cyclists or horse riders
  - in response to a question, it was confirmed that Fulking Down is open for public access
  - the NT is ready to implement a route through from the Dover Estate to the Centurion Way
  - the NT have a package of walks called 'Stroll the Downs' and it is hoped to produce a similar pack for horse riders
96. Members comments are summarised as follows:
- disappointment was expressed that the new Ordnance Survey maps no longer show the boundaries of the NT properties, however NT land with public access is shown as general 'open access' land
  - problems of access had arisen when NT owned the land but the FC managed the land, and this had been exacerbated by the current high turnover of FC staff in the area
  - the new NT Area Manager should be in place in September and will be invited to a future CAFWS meeting

### Consultations

#### Access to the Coast

97. Peter Brown updated members on the excellent presentations and workshop held by Defra on 17<sup>th</sup> July that he attended with Glynn Jones.
98. The workshop covered the main features of the consultation including the Vision and the four Options. Option 4 was considered the preferred option which would take several years to implement and provide an access corridor rather a narrow route for access users. It should be noted that this complex Consultation is to agree the principles of access to the coast, not the delivery.
99. A controversial point raised at the workshop was the presumption that no compensation will be paid to landowners/farmers, and it is anticipated this will be an issue.
100. It was felt that access should be devolved and determined locally, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. West Sussex already boasts a lot of existing footpaths along the coast and any new corridors could incorporate these.
101. Interested members were invited to a meeting of the Coastal Plain Sub Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> August to agree a draft response for review by CAFWS members prior to submission to Defra by 11 September.

#### Proposed South Downs National Park

102. Bill Acraman updated members on the Inspectors Report and proposing a revised boundary which had been amended to take in mainly the chalk ridge (core area) of the South Downs and exclude other parts such as the Weald (non core areas).
103. The core area had been described as 'unique' and approximately 3% of all planning applications in the current South Downs AONB would fall under the National Park Authority control. With regard to planning permission responsibilities, the view expressed was that WSCC were comfortable with those towns excluded from the proposed National Park boundaries.
104. The non core areas included the Rother Valley, Wealds, Petersfield and Pulborough and heathland areas, and there did not appear to be much rationale behind the proposed new boundaries. The anomaly of Coldwaltham being proposed for omission was highlighted as an example. In addition, Selbourne and The Hangers in Hampshire had been retained within the proposed boundaries although they are not chalk downland.
105. Continuity of management for the non core areas must be addressed as a key priority. There may be managerial advantage in merging areas omitted from a National park with the Surrey Hills AONBs.

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106. The response to Defra is required by 13 August 2007 and the SDJC, in common with many other consultee organisations, had asked for this deadline to be extended. (*update – this date has now been extended to 24 September 2007*)
107. Trevor Passmore indicated that many farmers do not want National Park status within the South Downs. As indicated earlier, funding is a key issue for the farming community and the example of the Brecon Beacon National Park funding being withdrawn was given as an example.
108. Ann Janes advised that the proposal would go to the Chichester District Council Executive Board on 24<sup>th</sup> July and agreed that the £6 million 'new money' is not sufficient and would cause long-term problems for farmers.
109. Members reviewed the proposed Forum response, drafted by Peter Brown, in light of the above comments and the majority view was that a revised response be sent. Mr Evans and Mr Jones felt that the original proposed National Park boundaries should remain and as a result, did not support all the response content.
110. **Resolved – that the Secretary update the response and send to Defra taking into account member comments.**

#### **Cocking, Graffham and Heyshott (Restricted Byway 952)**

111. Christine Luff provided an update on the proposed Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on Restricted Byway (RB) 952.
112. The responses received to the consultation to date were mixed. Some are in favour of extending the TRO to also exclude horse and carriages, including two responses from landowners, the South Downs Society, East Lavington Parish Council and the Murray Downland Trust. Other consultees do not support the proposal. .
113. The route is not commonly used by carriage drivers, and a key system would be introduced if the proposed TRO is successful. In addition, the Cowdray Estate has indicated that they would allow a nearby permissive route to accommodate any carriage drivers.
114. Mrs Baldwin spoke against the WSCC recommendation to make the TRO and her comments are summarised below:
  - carriage driving is a popular family activity, including ten groups especially for the disabled in the south
  - RB 952 is a long established link route between RBs 771 and 897 which are both part of the South Downs Way
  - Bruce Middleton, SDJC Northern Area Office, had photographs to the whole of the RB 952 to be in good condition
  - putting a TRO on this part of RB 952 would make it illegal for carriage drivers to use the path – a right carriage drivers had fought for through Parliament
  - the objective should be to stop the use of motorbikes
  - the area around RB 952 is open and easy for illegal use by motorbikes

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- the Pathwatch scheme has had some success in policing the illegal use of motorbikes
115. In light of the above, members made the following comments:
- the proposed TRO is only for only one path of the route, so it would not stop motorbikes using any of the other nearby routes
  - conscious of damage caused by motorbikes and 4x4 vehicles over reclaimed land
  - motorbikes would be able to get around any barriers/horse stiles
  - horse stiles would slow the motorbikes down thereby improving chances of capture
  - if a key system were introduced, it would not be acceptable if the whereabouts/availability of the key were not known
  - horse stiles had been removed by the National Trust following an accident
  - the Forum should encourage the route to be better policed – the Pathwatch initiative had reduced illegal usage elsewhere and could be stepped up
  - vehicle traffic needs to be controlled by locked gates
  - landowners could provide permissive access routes to accommodate carriage drivers
  - potential impact on the Disabilities Discrimination Act if the TRO is approved
  - WSCC had to follow their legal responsibilities regarding the TRO proposal
116. A key point from the debate was whether damage caused by motorised vehicles away from the route was the driver behind the reason for the TRO, and if so, this should be challenged.
117. The majority of members (12) agreed to reject the proposed inclusion of carriage drivers in a new TRO as it was felt to be unworkable, and the situation should be addressed by appropriate policing.
118. Forum members were encouraged to lobby the relevant County Local Committee (CLC) council members on this application.
119. **Resolved – Secretary to respond to WSCC and include the CLC council members for information.**

#### **Landowner/occupier right to apply for orders to divert/extinguish a public right of way**

120. Christine Luff updated members that, unlike several other highway authorities, WSCC has long been prepared to consider all applications for diversion/extinguishment and to take them to the Rights of Way Committee. The proposed right to apply would therefore have less impact on WSCC than other authorities but there is a concern that regulations may impose unreasonable time limits on processing applications
121. It was agreed that the Forum would leave WSCC to respond as it was a local authority matter.

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### Forestry Commission High Weald Forest Design Plan

122. Jane Noble will investigate further in the absence of the Forestry Commission representative at the meeting.

### Promoting Access – Walks Festival 2008

123. Jane Noble emphasised the WSCC objective was to encourage new audiences for such walks. Any comments by the Forum on the draft questionnaires should be submitted over the next four weeks.

### General Report

124. The Forum noted a General Report on a range of issues and interest to the Forum (copy attached to the signed minutes).
125. **Resolved – that the Secretary write a letter of thanks to PC Mark Hillman on his retirement in March 2008.**

Mr Passmore left the meeting at 2.10pm.

### Agenda Items for Consideration for the Next Meeting of the Forum

126. The following items were suggested for consideration: -
- theme of meeting to be promoting access by harness driving and walking
  - progress on the designation of the South Downs National Park
  - presentation by the Forestry Commission

### Matters for Information

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

### Date of Next Meeting

128. The next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum will be held at The Gordon Room, Worthing Town Hall 10.30am on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007

The meeting ended at 2.20pm and was followed by a guided trailer tour of Knepp Castle Estate and associated conservation projects.

### Chairman