

**Secretary to the Forum**

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**Agenda Item 9**

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If calling ask for

Our reference

Your reference

Fiona MacLeod

10th July 2007

Dear

**Strategic Development in West Sussex**

Last month, the Chairman, Mrs Ronnie Perrin, and Vice Chairman, Mr Peter Brown, of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS) attended a meeting of the Officers Joint Advisory Group on Strategy. The purpose was to make officers aware of CAFWS and of the role it should play as proposals for new areas of development proceed. The Forum asked me to write to you to confirm their interest and outline potential future co-operation.

CAFWS is an **independent statutory advisory body** established by West Sussex County Council (WSCC) under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Members are volunteers and represent a great range of experience and knowledge of access issues in the county. They are able to comment with authority on such topics as conservation, landscape, farming and forestry as well as all matters relating to public rights of way for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

To date, CAFWS has concentrated on dealing with the introduction of Access to Open Countryside under the Act (commonly termed Right to Roam) and helping WSCC to develop a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for the county. The ROWIP is due to be published. During the discussions of future needs, CAFWS members were very conscious of the "threat" of large numbers of housing developments proposed for the coming two decades.

CAFWS believes it has a key role to play as and when these new areas of development are identified and designed. In the past the consideration of access issues in the planning system has been entirely reactive. The result is that new developments, including infrastructure, have often harmed the local rights of way network by severance or poor design, whereas with more forethought, they could actually result in an improvement. CAFWS would like to be more proactive and is keen to work with district councils to that end. The larger the development, the larger the threat – but also the bigger the opportunity to improve the network and access to the countryside.

CAFWS itself has an interest in the whole of West Sussex. It has also established four Sub Forums to give detailed local advice on the main four landscape areas of the county (Coastal Plain, South Downs, Low Weald and High Weald). The Forum is therefore able to give advice to local authorities both at a strategic and a local level. You may like to note that Defra recently issued new guidance on Local Access Forums, requiring authorities to ensure Forums are consulted Such

authorities are required, in accordance with Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this Forum in carrying out its functions. You should also note that CAFWS is a separate entity from WSCC and does not necessarily share its views.

In summary, CAFWS believes it has a valuable role to play to protect and enhance opportunities for public access to the countryside and sustainable access between communities. Please will you make sure it is added to your list of consultees – CAFWS would like to be involved in as early a stage as possible. When a large new area of development is proposed, the Forum will endeavour to approach the problem along the following lines:

- Identify key features of the existing network of rights of way and access areas
- Highlight present problems/missing links to be addressed
- Assess likely impact of development on local network
- See what new links may be necessary
- Represent needs and aspirations of local walkers, cyclists and horse riders

Mrs Perrin and Mr Brown are happy to attend meetings to assist with the process, but suggest you make contact in the first instance through me as Secretary to the Forum

I am also taking this opportunity to enclose two copies the Forum's Annual Report for the period April 2006-March 2007 for your information. Please could I ask that you circulate a copy to all your officers involved in access and recreation.

Yours faithfully,

Fiona MacLeod

Secretary  
Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex  
[www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws)

**To all district and borough Planning Offices in West Sussex**