

Secretary to the Forum

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If calling ask for

Our reference

Your reference

Fiona MacLeod

1st August 2007

Dear Ms Gunningham,

Proposed South Downs National Park

The Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (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 access matters relating to conservation, landscape, farming and forestry as well as all matters relating to public rights of way for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

As you are aware, Defra recently issued new guidance on Local Access Forums, requiring authorities and other bodies to ensure Forums are consulted. Such authorities/other bodies 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. Please can you add CAFWS as a consultee for future consultations. You should also note that CAFWS is a separate entity from WSCC and does not necessarily share its views.

The Forum has noted the revised proposals relating to the boundaries of the proposed South Downs National Park and does not wish to make any comment on the relatively minor changes around the perimeter. However, the rationale for, and the exclusion of, the northern part of the Sussex Downs AONB does cause concern. At present the enhanced status of this part of the county is in the care of the South Downs Joint Committee, which has developed staffing and budgets to conserve the landscape and improve public access. If that area is not to be included within the National Park, we would seek assurances that it will still be managed at a level which reflects its AONB status. Continuity of management both within the proposed National Park and the remaining AONB is vital to success.

It would appear some special arrangement is necessary to deal with the future management of this Wealden area due to its high landscape value. It is unlikely that the County Council will be able to provide that additional level of funding and, therefore, the Forum believes that it is essential that long-term funding from government is guaranteed as part of the cost of establishing the new National Park.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona MacLeod
Secretary,
Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex

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