

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at Capron House, Midhurst, on 21st June 2006.

Present:

Mrs R Perrin (Chairman)

Mrs H Baldwin	Mr P Belden	Mr R Bidwell
Mr P Brown	Mr D Deedman	Mr S Evans
Mr G Jones	Mr T Passmore	Mr D Ribbens
Mr N Sloan		

WSCC Officers: David Marshall, Christine Luff, Jane Noble, Fiona MacLeod

Presenters: - PC Mark Hillman
Liz Beth, Sustrans

Apologies:-

1. Apologies for absence were received from Mr P Fancourt, Mrs A Janes, and Mr T White.
2. The Chairman advised the Forum that she had received a letter of resignation from Peter Fancourt as a result of the recent Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 legislation. He felt that the legislation, in particular Part 6, left him with very little to offer the Forum on matters of vehicular access.
3. The Chairman was pleased to note that Mr Fancourt had offered to advise the Forum on matters relating to motorised vehicles if required.

Welcome

4. The Chairman welcomed the speakers, observers and members of the public to the meeting.
5. Angela Shepherd was unable to attend due to illness.

Declarations of Interest

6. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

7. Minute 213 should read 'Adur' not 'Arun'.
8. Mr Jones referred to minute 241 and clarified that he had asked the Chairman if it would be helpful for the South Downs Access Forum to offer some suggestions and after some consideration she agreed that it would be.

9. **Resolved:** That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on 22nd March 2006 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

10. In relation to minute no 119, the Forum Secretary handed out a note to members clarifying the process to be used for members' reports.
11. Correspondence relating to minutes 182, 191, 211, 231, 239 together with relevant responses were available for members to view at the meeting.
- letter of support sent to YHA regarding new hostels
 - letter sent to Minister for Rural Affairs regarding the legal position on access to water in England. A non committal response has been received
 - letter sent to West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) regarding a new slipway at Shoreham
 - letter of support of the Sussex Pathwatch Scheme to Sussex Police
 - letter sent to Highways Agency to consider upgrade the bridge over the A27 at Tangmere to accommodate equestrian access
12. The Forum Secretary advised that the request for a new slipway at Shoreham will be an Agenda item at the Adur County Local Committee (CLC) meeting to be held on 7th September at 7pm in Kings Manor Community College, Shoreham. The letter from the Forum had added weight to this topic.
13. A letter from James Ort, Officer, South Downs Access Forum (SDAF), had been received relating to minute 241 regarding their offer of input into rights of way improvements and funding available to the SDAF. The Chairman highlighted that the funding awarded for such improvements was not Forum money but WSSCC money, and that the South Downs already has funding available from other sources. The initial £300k is being used to clear backlogs on bridleways and bridges.
14. David Marshall clarified that although CAFWS will not be part of the funding prioritisation or ratification process, the Forum would welcome any advice from its members on rights of way needs. WSSCC will then consider this advice for future programmes of work
15. In response to a question from Mr Jones, David Marshall further clarified that the planning and programme of work will cover years 2 and 3 of the additional funding. Rights of Way were not aware of the funding until February 2006. As a result, it was agreed to spend the £300k on existing needs and priorities such as those routes considered to be dangerous.
16. Planning will take place for years 2 and 3 to provide a true investment in infrastructure. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) should highlight improvements and maintenance proposals. Mr Belden pointed out that the Forum was here to suggest improvements to be taken forward for prioritisation by WSSCC and recognised that this funding provided an excellent opportunity.

17. There were no urgent matters for the Forum to discuss.

Update on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

18. The Forum noted the report. (copy attached to signed minutes)
19. Christine Luff provided members with an update to her written report and highlighted that with effect from 2nd May 2006, all Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) became restricted byways.
20. The Land Access and Recreation Association (LARA) had questioned WSCC's conclusion that BOAT claims made after the cut-off date of 20th January 2005 need not be processed to determination. Defra has since issued guidance representing its view of the law, which is that BOAT applications made after the cut-off date should not be abandoned or simply not proceeded with. The County Council is examining the guidance.
21. David Marshall confirmed that guidance is awaited from Defra regarding signage of restricted byways, and it is understood that the colour plum has been designated for use. Some former RUPPs are currently waymarked with a blank board, and all restricted byways will be waymarked with restricted byway markings and information notices to avoid user misunderstanding.
22. Although it is likely to be some weeks before all the signage information is received from Defra, costings for waymarking are in progress. The South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) is involved in this exercise.

Sussex Pathwatch Scheme

23. PC Mark Hillman, Sussex Police, talked to the Forum on the year long pilot for the Sussex Pathwatch scheme launched on 18th May in the Chichester District area. Dependent on results and success, it is expected that the scheme will then roll out countywide.
24. PC Hillman emphasised that although the pilot is in the Chichester District area, callers are encouraged to report incidents throughout the county, quoting Pathwatch.
25. The scheme will enable people to report illegal, irresponsible and inappropriate use of motorised vehicles in the countryside.
26. David Marshall advised that the issue with trail bikes is not confined to rural areas, and urban areas such as Crawley and Burgess Hill are also affected. WSCC are making the whole county aware of Pathwatch scheme.
27. In response to a question from Mr Passmore regarding illegal raves, PC Hillman explained that there is a police 'Rave Group' in place and they have several prosecutions pending on rave organisers. The vehicle owners have had letters regarding the offences.

28. PC Hillman referred to the provisions of Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 which give the police powers to stop, seize and remove motor vehicles that are used in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance.
29. A team of special constables is being trained. Most officers would be unaware of the new category of highway, restricted byways, and the new signage will be very helpful.
30. Key points are summarised below:
 - users should be encouraged to report all incidents to ensure Sussex Police get a true extent of the problem and take appropriate action
 - quote Pathwatch when ringing the 0845 6070999 phone number
 - tell police the path being used (if known) and the direction of travel of the vehicles
 - if possible, take pictures of incidents
 - quad bikes are classified road legal agricultural vehicles and can therefore be reported
 - to ensure its success, Pathwatch needs to be promoted as widely as possible to the public and other organisations
 - Pathwatch cards will be available in village shops, libraries etc
 - PC Hillman will be invited to update the Forum in a year's time

Sustrans

31. The Forum received a very informative presentation with slides from Liz Beth of Sustrans on a wide variety of cycle related topics. These ranged from the increase in cycle use in the county and cycle route networks, to the impact of street furniture on safety and the perception on safety from users of quiet lanes.
32. Mr Jones highlighted that there is often conflict when walkers are not made aware of approaching cyclists and suggested that courtesy to other users should be included in cycle proficiency schemes.

Action: Jane Noble to investigate what role WSCC has in delivering cycle training.

33. Key points are summarised below: -
 - most cycleways that are not designated as bridleways are maintained by the Highways Authority, working with Sustrans.
 - a bridge is available for use by cyclists over the A27 on the Chichester to Bognor cycle route.
 - Sustrans are trying to link the Ropetackle site at Shoreham northwards towards Steyning as part of the Downs Link project. It is hoped that it will attract 'safe routes to school' funding.
 - the track used for access to the riverbank on the Bramber bypass could potentially be used as an abstract route for the Steyning link.
 - over-engineering of signage that replicates urban solutions is undesirable - rural solutions are needed for rural areas.
 - unsegregated paths for cyclists are preferred by Sustrans based on the 'uncertainty' principle where users meeting will slow down.

Seminar on Accessible Natural Greenspaces in the South East Region

34. The Chairman reported on the above Seminar hosted by the Countryside Agency (CA) on 16th June 2006. This was a technical but fascinating event with a presentation by Patrick McKernon who is scheduled to speak to the Forum at the October meeting.
35. The CA and Forestry Commission have jointly funded a study analysing the provision of accessible natural greenspace in the South East. The study involved collating and digitally mapping all natural greenspace greater than two hectares within the region.
36. This analysis has produced, amongst other things, region-wide statistics on access provision, areas of access deficiency, a model of population pressure on accessible natural greenspace, and analysis of the role of woodlands, designated sites, and AONBs in providing accessible natural greenspace.
37. The intention is that local authorities will be able to access this information from the Internet.
38. James Ort advised that the SDAF had expressed concern over the access models used at the Seminar. SDAF had recommended that, when established from the amalgamation of the Countryside Agency, English Nature, and Defra's Rural Development Service, Natural England and partners do not rely exclusively on access provision models when deciding where to provide access.

Consultation Documents

39. Jane Noble advised that consultation documents had previously been reviewed by WSCC and draft responses brought to the Forum for agreement and/or further comments. However, on occasions the timing of meetings does not allow this, and a system is needed to enable the Forum to respond to such consultations.
40. The Forum Secretary provided members with an example of a Comments Log that would be used for consultations. The Log will give a standardised approach, enable themes to be identified easily and provide a single document for reference. This approach was well received and agreed by members.

Action: Forum Secretary to issue Comments Log and paper copies as required for both consultation documents to enable timescales to be met.

South Downs Management Plan (SDMP) Consultation

41. The SDMP is being launched at the South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) conference on 22nd June. A copy of the document will be available to view at County Hall and on the new SDJC website. (www.southdowns.gov.uk/) The deadline for responses is October 2006.

Unconfirmed Minutes – subject to approval/amendment at the next meeting of the Forum

42. Comments on the SDMP using the Log to be sent to the Forum Secretary by Friday 1st September.

Action: Forum members to return completed Comments Log to the Forum Secretary by 1st September.

Action: Forum Officer to prepare draft Forum response for the SDMP to be brought to the next meeting of the Forum.

Outdoors for All? Draft Diversity Action Plan.

43. A copy of the Plan was available for members to view at the meeting. The deadline for responses is September 2006.

44. Comments on the Diversity Action Plan using the Log to be sent to the Forum Secretary by Friday 1st September. The Plan can be found on www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/outdoorsdiversity/ and a hard copy of the Consultation document will be available to view at County Hall.

Action: Forum members to return completed Comments Log to the Forum Secretary by 1st September.

Action: Forum Officer, Forum Secretary, Chairman and Vice-Chairman to prepare, agree and send response on the Draft Diversity Action Plan.

CAFWS Annual Report

45. The Forum reviewed the draft Annual Report to March 2006. Very minor changes to the text were suggested and the Forum agreed to keep the period covered by the report of April 2005-March 2006.
46. The distribution list will be updated and expanded as the Annual Report will provide a good vehicle to promote awareness of the Forum.
47. Notification of the re-designation of RUPPs to restricted byways and information on the Sussex Pathwatch Scheme will be included in the covering letter sent out with the Report.

Recreation and Access Provisions for New Major Developments

48. The Chairman introduced this new item as a key topic for consideration by CAFWS.
49. The Vice-Chairman agreed that this was a vital issue throughout West Sussex, citing examples on the coastal plain and where rural lanes go in and out of housing estates. The issue will grow in relation to the large volume of housing due to be built in the county.
50. Haywards Heath was quoted as an example of major development where there were the opportunities and needs to cater for the demand of new rights of way, upgrading of existing networks and 'missing links' through the funding of the new development.

51. David Marshall confirmed that Rights of Way Section is already involved in such developments at planning stages, however CAFWS should also have a voice in the planning process.
52. The Vice-Chairman re-iterated that this was a significant opportunity for CAFWS to make a difference and act in a co-ordinating role to protect existing access and plan for new routes to meet current and future needs. A holistic approach needs to be taken.
53. Members suggested that local planners from both County and District Councils be invited to talk to the Forum at a later meeting. Topics should include how the planning systems can deliver improved access and how CAFWS can best influence this.
54. Mr Ribbens advised that 2.5 metre access has been included in a recent affordable housing development, demonstrating that developers are starting to appreciate the need for access features. However, this is not currently being linked into additional external access to the countryside by developers.
55. Mr Passmore remarked that input from the police will be needed when retaining or introducing new footpaths regarding the potential for anti-social behaviour.
56. A conference covering the topic was discussed. However it was agreed that the initial way forward is to identify organisations where CAFWS can be added as a consultee for major new developments.
57. **Resolved: Chairman, Vice-Chairman and officers to agree process for involvement in strategic development planning consultations.**

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

58. Jane Noble explained that the working draft of the RoWIP had not been brought to the meeting as the initial internal timescales were over-optimistic and the draft Plan is not yet suitable for review.
59. David Marshall reminded the Forum that the statutory date for the completion of the Plan is not until November 2007 and as such, WSCC have progressed their work on the Plan well in advance of this date.
60. The revised timetable is:
 - August – draft Plan to be completed
 - 15th September – draft Plan to be approved by WSCC to go for consultation
 - September – draft plan to be issued for consultation including Forum and Sub Fora members
 - 4th October – Agenda item for CAFWS meeting

National Countryside Access Forum (NCAF)

61. The Chairman thanked Mr Ribbens for his very comprehensive and informative written report. (copy attached to signed minutes)

General Report

62. The Forum noted a general report on a range of issues and interest to the Forum (copy attached to the signed minutes)

Matters Suitable for Publicity

63. The Annual Report will provide a vehicle to publicise the Forum and its activities.
64. Jane Noble advised that the Forum is to be promoted at a talk she is giving to a community group in Shoreham in August.

Agenda items for consideration for the next Meeting of the Forum

65. The Forum Secretary confirmed that Patrick McKernon has agreed be a speaker at the next meeting.
66. Speakers on the planning system will be sought.
67. The draft RoWIP and South Downs Management Plan Consultation Draft will be reviewed.

Date of Next Meeting

68. The next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum will be held at 10.30am on Wednesday 4th October 2006 at Clair Hall, Haywards Heath.

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm

Chairman