

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

At a meeting of the Forum held at the Village Hall, Billingshurst on 24th January 2007.

Present:

Mrs R Perrin (Chairman)

Mr B Acraman	Mrs H Baldwin	Mr P Belden
Mr P Brown	Mr J Emrich	Mr S Evans
Mrs M Gue	Mr G Jones	Mr T Passmore
Mr D Ribbens	Mr T White	Mr D Whyberd
Mrs S Wright		

West Sussex County Council (WSSC) Officers: David Marshall, Christine Luff, Jane Noble, Fiona MacLeod

Presenters: - David Elliott, National Trust
John Kilford, WSSC
Ian Burton. Mid-Sussex District Council

Apologies:-

127. Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J Beuzeval, Mr D Deedman and Mr N Sloan.

Welcome

128. The Chairman welcomed the speakers, observers and members of the public to the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

129. There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

130. **Resolved:** That the minutes of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex meeting held on 4th October 2006 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising

131. In response to an email question on minutes 94-96 (mapping open access) from Nigel Sloan, Jane Noble confirmed that this was aspirational in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) recently issued for consultation by WSSC and dependant on funding.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

132. Reference was made to the South Downs Access Forum (SDAF) Open Access Mapping project presentation given to the Forum at their last meeting on 4th December 2006. Jane Noble also highlighted that copies of the presentation given by Ordnance Survey to the SDAF meeting on 6th December were available for members.
133. The minutes of the latest SDAF meeting had not yet been published and a question was asked if the Forum members should have sight of all sub-fora minutes for review at CAFWS meetings. The Forum should be in a position to discuss activities from sub fora meetings, in particular the SDAF as this is the most active with regular meetings and presenters. A brief summary of the topics covered at sub fora, as well as neighbouring forum, meetings is included in the general report and the cross-forum representatives can always be contacted if further information is required (SDAF - Nigel Sloan, Coastal Plain – Helen Baldwin, Low Weald – Sion Evans, High Weald – Tricia Butcher (note; Tricia Butcher does not sit on the main Forum but usually attends as an observer). It was pointed out that due to the timings of the various meetings including other neighbouring Local Access Forums (LAFs) it would not always be possible to have the latest unconfirmed minutes for discussion or for every decision made by a sub-fora to be ratified by CAFWS.
134. A schedule of all the known 2007 meetings of the sub fora and regional LAFs was made available for members at the meeting.
135. **Resolved – that the minutes of all available CAFWS sub fora be included as an Agenda item with effect from the April 2007 meeting**

Urgent Matters

136. The Forum was updated on the Fundamental Service Review (FSR) being undertaken by WSCC. The County Council has to 'save' £15million this financial year and a further £15million in the following financial year including the loss of 400 posts. As a result of the Review, the Rural Strategy Group will lose 4 posts and gain two new posts (net loss of 2 posts).
137. The Chairman had written to the Director for Environment & Development, WSCC expressing very great concern regarding the loss of expertise and knowledge, in particular the removal of the Strategic Access and Rights of Way Manager post, and the potential impact for delivery of RoWIP projects.
138. A response had been received from the Director for Environment & Development acknowledging the Chairman's concerns. An impact assessment had been carried out on posts likely to impact on CAFWS and a process is being put in place to ensure knowledge is transferred to those remaining in service. In addition, provisions will be put in place to provide the same standard of service and arrangements to support the Forum.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

139. Mr Acraman categorically stated that the Rights of Way Budget would suffer no reduction, and that for 2007/08 it would remain the same as currently but would include an inflationary increase of 3%. He also reminded the Forum that WSCC had received the lowest grant from Government for all the shire counties for the third successive financial year.
140. Members agreed that a further letter should be sent to the Council Leader and Cabinet Chairman, and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy for assurances that funding for the RoWIP and other Forum interests will be made available.
141. **Resolved – that the Chairman write to the Council Leader and Cabinet Member on behalf of the Forum**
142. The Chairman thanked David Marshall for all the expertise and guidance he had given to the Forum, and for championing open access and rights of way to make West Sussex the envy of other counties. This view was fully endorsed by Forum members.
143. Christine Luff reported that the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) consultation on the Protection of Common Land in England (The Commons Act 2006) has been produced. The consultation ends on 9th April 2007 and members were given a précis of the salient points at the meeting. The full consultation paper is available on www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/commonsact2006. All registered common land is detailed on the Natural England web site www.naturalengland.org.uk. She advised that WSCC will provide its own response on the consultation and drew members' attention to page 30 of the consultation, regarding the new role of Local Access Forums in advising local authorities in their area on the best way of prioritising their enforcement powers in order to help safeguard and promote freedom of access over common land.
144. **Resolved – that the Forum Secretary provides members with a Comments Log for completion**

National Trust land at Black Down nr Haslemere – DEFRA fencing application

145. David Elliott, National Trust Head Warden for Black Down outlined the restoration work undertaken over the last 10 years to restore and recreate heathland and opening up view points. Black Down is a registered Common and Site of Nature Conservation Importance for its heathland flora and fauna and is the second highest point in the south of England
146. Grazing of cattle needs to be introduced to balance and control both woodland and heathland. As a result, fencing is required on common land and the National Trust is seeking permission from DEFRA to do so. There is already similar grazing on another part of Black Down that had proved popular and very successful in terms of heathland restoration. Support for the new grazing and fencing had been received from Fernhurst and Lurgashall Parish Councils, Haslemere Town Council and the Ramblers Association (RA).

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

147. Mr Elliott explained that the Aberdeen Angus breed of cattle had been chosen for grazing for their calm and placid nature with people and dogs. Jason Emrich advised the Forum that the 'Grazing Animals Project' can offer advice on appropriate animals for similar initiatives. <http://www.grazinganimalsproject.info>
148. **Resolved –the Forum Secretary write to the National Trust endorsing the fencing proposal and requesting an updated map when the fencing is completed**

Strategic New Developments – District Council Process

149. Ian Burton, Head of Service, Mid-Sussex District Council gave a presentation on the successful integration of recreation and countryside access in the planning process in place for Mid-Sussex District Council. (copy attached to signed minutes) The Burgess Hill Green Crescent was used as one of the case studies.
150. Key points were: -
- the Forum needs to be included into the Stakeholder Team as early as possible
 - the Area Action Plan is an important process for early involvement by the Forum
 - their approach may be more finely developed than some other District Councils
 - landscape strategy/masterplans have been developed
 - Mid-Sussex appreciate that WSCC has been significant in encouraging people to access the countryside and rights of way network
 - 'friends groups' are used for community engagement
 - footpaths linked into the existing network from new developments are cited as examples for good practice

Strategic New Developments –Design and Access Statements

151. John Kilford, Director of West Sussex Design Commission and County Planning Consultant, WSCC gave a presentation on Design Principles and Design and Access Statements (DAS) and the important opportunity and potential for Forum involvement. (copy attached to the signed minutes)
152. The Design Commission has produced the West Sussex Design Principles on behalf of West Sussex County Council; WSCC access officers have had little or no involvement with its content.
153. Section 42 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced a requirement for DASs to be prepared and submitted with planning applications. These should explain how equal and convenient access to buildings and spaces and the public transport network will be insured for all users, and also explain the policy adopted in relation to access. They relate only to access *to* the development and not to internal spaces.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

154. Key points were:-

- the Forum has a right to be involved in the process and needs to be proactive
- the Forum should go direct to developers/planners and ask to be involved in the consultation process for major developments
- the West Sussex Design Principles (15 in total) covering every conceivable aspect of good design are scheduled for launch 23rd March 2007.
- all buildings and the spaces between them, and all aspects of pedestrian access will be covered
- an opportunity to prove the Forum's credibility, expertise and local knowledge would be involvement in the East Grinstead development by way of a small Working Group. This will be progressed at the next Forum meeting

155. The Q&A session is summarised below:

- **Q** – do developers need to notify planners if the development is going across existing rights of way.
A – if the DAS has been produced according to the guidelines, then the rights of way will be referred to. Mr Kilford stated that he will request this to be firmed up during the coming Government review. WSCC RoW Team already comment on any planning applications that affect rights of way.
- **Q** –although nearly all planning applications have to be accompanied by a DAS, they appear to be very inconsistent and the perception is that they can be used to actually justify a development
- **A** – councils are always constrained by resources, especially in the planning areas. It is hoped that Design Principles will improve the planning process.
- **Q** – decisions on road crossing access provisions are a big issue i.e. access over or under roads, habitat bridges etc. When should negotiations regarding the best option and associated costs take place, including the commitment for long-term maintenance.
A – these issues should come out in the DAS and as a result be discussed as part of the early consultation process. It is key that the Forum is involved at the earliest stage possible for large developments
- **Q** – does 'people engagement' actually work and deliver change when consulting on developments.
A – the DAS should be a tool for a whole life maintenance proposal to overcome divisions of points of view and enhance the environment

156. The Forum thanked both presenters for providing the level of information needed to take forward the consultation process. It was agreed that there is opportunity for influence and that relationships need to be built with district and borough councils in West Sussex.

157. There will be stakeholder involvement from the Forum as a result of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan especially where urban fringes are concerned.

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

158. David Marshall informed members that a training event was taking place for district and borough council planning and legal staff, and CAFWS was on the Agenda.
159. Local parish and district/borough councils should be contacted offering the Forums' assistance and expertise on major new developments.
160. **Resolved – members to provide input to Forum Secretary on best way to take this forward. Forum Secretary to then contact local parish and district/borough councils.**

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

161. Jane Noble thanked members of the Forum and sub fora for their responses to the consultation document. A summary of the Forum's response was made available to members at the meeting.
162. Overall, 150 questionnaires and 20 letters were received by the closing date of 12 January 2007 and analysis is in progress. The final version of the RoWIP is scheduled for completion in May when it will be submitted for Cabinet Member approval.
163. An update was given on the disappointing and frustrating position regarding the cutback in funding from the Local Transport Plan (LTP). Jane Noble explained that Highway and Transport budgets have been affected by FSR and as a result funding is being prioritised for road safety related schemes, specifically casualty reduction, rather than being made available for actions from the RoWIP. However, there may be the opportunity to secure some funding for safety influenced access improvements.
164. **Resolved – that the Chairman write to the Cabinet Members for Environment & Economy and Highways & Transport on behalf of the Forum expressing strong objections to the lack of funding from the LTP.**
165. Monitoring is a key factor in the RoWIP delivery process. A two-part plan documenting achievements to date and future deliverables will be presented to the Forum for ratification at the October meeting.

CAFWS 2007/8 Work Programme

166. The Forum reviewed the draft programme and project briefs produced by the Vice-Chairman as an aid for discussion.
167. Members agreed that forming small task groups for individual pieces of countywide work, and allowing the sub fora to concentrate on pieces of work purely within their geographical boundaries, was the best way forward.
168. Task group leaders may need to recruit additional members from within and outside the Forum. In addition, it is key that the Forum Officer is involved in the early stages. This will enable the group to learn what, if any, previous work had been undertaken on a topic, who the main

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

contacts are and various other aspects that will help avoid duplication of effort and maximise the benefits of the work.

169. Glynn Jones advised that there is a consultation regarding the Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy that needs a response by the 14 February and this could be an ideal subject for the Coastal Plain Sub Forum to pick up.
170. Tricia Butcher, Chairman of the High Weald Sub Forum agreed to lead a task force on the East Grinstead development, and Trevor Passmore will investigate access to water. David Ribbens agreed to lead on disabled access, David Whyberd offered to assist and it was suggested Julia Beauzeval has the knowledge to also help. Further members for these task groups are likely to be required.
171. Time constraints were a major concern regarding progression of the final work programme and in particular, the feedback from the task groups to the CAFWS members if recommendations needed ratification. Peter Brown will co-ordinate the task groups
172. **Resolved – that the potential programme of work for 2007 and project brief process for task forces be agreed (copies attached to the signed minutes)**
173. Sion Evans identified that the Low Weald Sub Forum would like the Forum to consider volunteer work on rights of way and suggested that East Sussex County Council be approached to give a presentation on their volunteer programme. He had already raised the profile of CAFWS with his involvement on the Burgess Hill Green Crescent development.
174. **Resolved – Forum Secretary to contact ESCC**
175. The members noted the proposed South Downs Access Forum's (SDAF) work programme for 2007, and agreed a letter be written to Natural England to ensure continued support and local training for the Local Access Forums (LAFs).
176. **Resolved – that the Forum Secretary write to Natural England**

CAFWS 2006/7 Annual Report

177. Members agreed that the format used for the 2005/6 Annual Report should remain for the 2006/7 Report. Jane Noble asked members to send her suitable photographs for consideration and reminded them that consent for images will be required if people are identifiable in the pictures. She can provide forms if required.
178. A section to cover activities undertaken as part of the Work Programme will be included.

General Report

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

Unconfirmed minutes – to be agreed at the next meeting of the Forum

180. The Forum Secretary updated members that Bill Jenman, South Downs Trail Manager, was leaving the post to return to conservation work in Wiltshire, and the replacement for Liz Beth at Sustrans is Chris Boocock. (chris.boocock@sustrans.org.uk). The decision on the status of the South Downs National Park has been delayed by the Government and is now unlikely to be announced before 2008.

Agenda items for consideration for the next Meeting of the Forum

181. The following items were suggested for consideration for the AGM meeting in addition to the election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman: -
- RoWIP
 - Initial feedback by the East Grinstead and disabled access task groups
 - Influencing the planning process update
 - roles of the SDAF and the South Downs Joint Committee on rights of way on the South Downs
 - Sussex Pathwatch initiative update
 - access on the coast
 - new LAF regulations
182. It was agreed that the next meeting would pilot continuing the meeting after lunch if appropriate to cover Forum business and provide an opportunity for task groups to interact with members after the meeting if time allows.

Date of Next Meeting

183. The next meeting of the Countryside Access Forum will be held at 10.30am on Wednesday 18th April 2007 at the Capron House, Midhurst.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm

Chairman