

WEST SUSSEX LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At a meeting of the Forum held at Clair Hall, Haywards Heath on 10th June, 2003.

Present: Mr. Elliott (Chairman)

Mrs. Barnes	Mr. Deedman	Mr. Sloane
Mrs. Baldwin	Mr. Evans	Mr. Stainton
Mr. Belden	Mr. Passmore	Mrs. Webber
Mr. Bidwell	Mrs. Perrin	Mr. Whitbread
Mr. Brown	Mr. Quinton	Mr. White

Observers: Mr. Acraman, Chairman, WSCC Rights of Way Committee, Mr. Andrew Whitnell, Access Development and Forum Officer, East Sussex County Council.

Officers in attendance: Lisa Creaye-Griffin, Christine Luff, David Marshall and Penny Murray.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Ms. Hare, Cllr. Mrs. Janes, Mr. Trinick and Mrs. Wright.

MINUTES

17. The minutes of the meeting held on 19th March, 2003 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Paragraph 12 : Establishment of Sub Forums – amend Sussex to South Downs Access Forum and add Mr. Deedman to members interested to serve on the South Downs Access Forum.

MATTERS ARISING

18. On minute 5 (other Local Access Forums in the South-East) David Marshall reported that Hampshire, as a pilot Forum area, had held its fifth meeting on the 18th June. Surrey Local Access Forum and East Sussex Local Access Forum had held their first meetings on the 4th June. Mr. Andrew Whitnell, Secretary to the East Sussex County Local Access Forum was welcomed to the meeting as an observer.

19. On minute 11, (Forum Terms of Reference), the Forum noted that the West Sussex County Council's Cabinet Member for Strategic Environmental Services had approved the amendment to paragraph One of the West Sussex Local Access Forum's Terms of Reference – Function of the Local Access Forum.

20. On minute 12, (Establishment of Sub Forums), the Forum noted that advertisements seeking applications for membership of the South Downs Access Forum would be going to press shortly and that a Panel would be convened to make the appointments. It was also noted

that Brighton and Hove City Council would be setting up an Access Forum within the next couple of months. Lisa Creaye-Griffin advised that the County Council would be appointing a Local Access Forum Officer to support the work of the Forum and Sub-Forums. It was hoped that an appointment would be made by September.

ACCESS LAND – THE WAY FORWARD

21. The Forum received a presentation by Mr. Glynn Jones on behalf of the Countryside Agency. The Forum noted that the access land mapping in the south-east had reached the appeal stage, processing appeals by those with a legal interest in the land. Over 148 appeals had been lodged against the provisional map. Draft regulations for closures and restrictions were due to be published by DEFRA this summer with a Commencement Order date of August 2004 expected. The Local Access Forum would have a role to comment on the appointment of wardens for access land and on proposals for bylaws in addition to commenting on long-term local restrictions. Short-term restrictions would be dealt with by the Countryside Agency. The Forum would also give advice on the statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plan which would include advice on links to access land. The powerpoint slides used in Glynn Jones' presentation would be circulated to Forum members.

IMPLICATIONS OF NEW ACCESS LAND

22. Lisa Creaye-Griffin made a presentation to the Forum on the implications of the new access arrangements which would follow the Commencement Order expected in August 2004. It was acknowledged that a key issue would be interpreting new access arrangements to the public. Where possible, the public should be informed at an early stage where short-term restrictions could be planned in advance. However, it was noted that the Forum's role was to comment on restrictions rather than to publicise them. The Forum agreed that it was important for all access land to be mapped comprehensively to include access to land owned by organisations such as the Ministry of Defence and National Trust and land accessed under the Countryside Stewardship scheme, etc. Glynn Jones advised that the Countryside Agency had bid, unsuccessfully, for funding to set up a national access database which would cover all land which could be accessed by the public. The Forum considered this database would be extremely valuable and that the Countryside Agency should be asked to set it up.

23. Resolved - that the Chairman be authorised to write to the Countryside Agency, on behalf of the Forum, in support of the establishment and maintenance of a national access database.

MILESTONES STATEMENT FOR WEST SUSSEX

24. David Marshall outlined the background to the publication of the Milestones Statement which had been drawn up to measure performance against the Countryside Agency's key objective set in 1987 that the Rights of Way national network should be legally defined, properly maintained and well publicised by the year 2000. The County Council continued to work towards this target which had largely been achieved and the cycle of inspecting rights of way for maintenance had been reduced from eighteen months to nine. A quarterly monitoring report on the Milestones Statement was presented to the County Council's Rights of Way Committee as a monitoring tool for performance against targets.

25. Lisa Creaye-Griffin reported on the measures undertaken by the County Council to publicise rights of way including the annual South Downs Way Walk, publication of walks leaflets and an interactive map on the County Council's website which included a routefinder. Problems on rights of way could also be logged in and emailed back to the County Council.

26. It was noted that Milestones would be phased out over the next few years and replaced by the Rights of Way Improvement Plan which was a statutory requirement under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. A report which gives further details of the components of the Milestones Statement is attached to these minutes for information. The Forum's role is one of strategic overview rather than involvement with issues relating to particular paths. It will act as an advisory body to the County Council contributing to the final development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and, initially, to make suggestions about issues that could be incorporated into the Plan.

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM FORUM MEMBERS

27. Written answers were tabled to issues raised by Mr. Evans and Mr. White and the issues together with the responses are attached to these minutes. Mr. Sloan raised the issue that the Local Access Forum should be consulted on all proposed major changes to West Sussex County Council policy in the field of countryside access and rights of way and Lisa Creaye-Griffin confirmed that such policy issues would come to the Forum for advice. The Forum was advised that the County Council's policy on the Use of Traffic Regulation Orders on Public rights of Way had been approved but that, if the policy had been at a draft stage, it would have been submitted to the Forum for comment.

AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

28. The agenda for the next meeting will include:

- Report on the timetable for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Forum members were asked to submit issues which they considered should be addressed by the Plan in writing or by e-mail to Lisa Creaye-Griffin (lisa.creaye-griffin@westsussex.gov.uk) by **31st August, 2003**.

- Progress report on the establishment of Sub-Forums.
- Presentation on the establishment of the South Downs Access Forum by Nicola Redwood, Strategic Access Officer.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

29. Forum members requested a glossary of terms to be drawn up to enable them to fully understand the Rights of Way terminology.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

30. The next meeting of the Forum will be held at 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 24th September, 2003 at Billingshurst Village Hall.

CHAIRMAN