

WEST SUSSEX LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At a meeting of the Forum held at Billingshurst Village Hall on 24th September, 2003.

Present: Mr. Elliott (Chairman)

Mrs. Baldwin	Mr. Deedman	Mr. Trinick
Mrs. Barnes	Mr. Evans	Mrs. Webber
Mr. Belden	Cllr. Mrs. Janes	Mr. Whitbread
Mr. Bidwell	Mr. Jones	Mr. White
Mr. Brown	Mr. Passmore	Mrs. Wright

Observers: Mr. Acraman, Chairman, WSCC Rights of Way Committee and Dr. Redwood, Strategic Access Officer.

In attendance: Mr. Chris Wright (Ramblers' Association), Mr. Rod Edbrooke (Surrey County Council).

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

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. Perrin, Mr. Sloan and Mr. Stainton.

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Glynn Jones to his first meeting as a member of the Forum, Roland Seber, the newly appointed Rural Strategy and Access Officer and Rosemary Pugh from the Secretariat.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

31. There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

32. The minutes of the meeting held on 10th June, 2003 were signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

ACCESS FORUM MEMBERSHIP

33. Lisa Creaye-Griffin reported a letter of resignation from Mr. Billingham for personal reasons. He had proposed that Mr. John Couzens, Chairman of the All Wheel Drive, might be approached to succeed him. The Forum acknowledged that Mr. Couzens had been a member of the Milestones Consultative Group and was well informed about the needs of motorised user groups. The Forum agreed that Mr. Couzens should be invited to be a member of the Forum in place of Mr. Billingham.

MATTERS ARISING

34. On minute 15 (other Local Access Forums in the South-East), David Marshall reported that Hampshire would be holding its sixth meeting in early October and that East Sussex Local Access Forum was holding its second meeting on the 24th September. The Forum agreed that it would be advisable, in future, to avoid a clash of dates with other Forum meetings.
35. On minute 20 (Establishment of Sub-Forums), the Forum noted that appointments had been made to the South Downs Access Forum (SDAF) which would hold its first meeting on 26th September, 2003. It was noted that Nigel Sloan, from the West Sussex Local Access Forum had been appointed to SDAF and would be reporting back on SDAF meetings and that Mr. Glynn Jones, a new LAF member, had also been appointed to SDAF. No dates had yet been set for meetings of other Sub-Forums but it was noted that Roland Seber would be co-ordinating their meeting dates to enable them, if possible, to report to the January meeting of the Local Access Forum.
36. On minute 23 (Implications of New Access Land), the Chairman reported that he had written to the Countryside Agency, on behalf of the Forum, in support of the establishment and maintenance of a national access database. The Countryside Agency's response advised that a study had been undertaken into the feasibility of developing a National Countryside Access Database and the Agency was now seeking funding to take the project forward. A bid to DEFRA had been rejected and other funding opportunities were now being considered including whether a regional pilot in conjunction with a Regional Development Agency would be an alternative way of making progress.
37. Resolved – That the Forum Secretary should advise the Countryside Agency that the Forum would be willing to take part in the regional pilot for the development of a National Countryside Access Database.
38. On minute 29 (Glossary of Terms), It was noted that members had received a Glossary of Terms with reference to Rights of Way terminology together with a list of West Sussex County Council staff involved in Rights of Way work.

COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000 PART 1

Regulations relating to the Removal or Relaxation of general restrictions on access land

39. Christine Luff advised the Forum on a Government consultation paper (previously circulated), which had dealt with options for a proposal to allow landowners to permit public use of access land for purposes other than on foot. The consultation sought views on whether such activities should be permitted by regulation or more informal basis. She advised that the County Council officer view was to support the regulations option which, it was considered, would assist in protecting the pedestrian public from other uses which may, if and when permitted, be detrimental to their quiet enjoyment of access land. Some Forum members agreed with this view but others considered that landowners already had to deal with a great many regulations that further regulations would not be helpful. Members voted on the options: eight

members supported option 1 (informal basis) and five members of the Forum preferred option 3 (in support of regulations). The views of the Forum will be notified to DEFRA in response to the consultation.

40. Guidance from DEFRA on the functions of the Access Authorities under Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 had also been circulated to Forum members. In connection with one of the Forum's key tasks, to consider and advise the County Council on enabling and managing access to access land, it was acknowledged that the guidelines gave helpful information and advice. It was agreed that the contents of the document would be discussed at the next Forum meeting.
41. Forum members received and noted a DEFRA press release on the rights of landowners to dedicate land for public access under new regulations recently laid before Parliament.

SOUTH DOWNS ACCESS FORUM

42. Nicola Redwood, Strategic Access Officer for the South Downs, made a presentation on the South Downs Access Forum (SDAF) which would hold its first informal meeting on 26th September, 2003. Members noted that the SDAF was a non-statutory sub-forum of the Local Access Forums (LAFs) established by the four highway authorities covered by the Sussex Downs and East Hampshire AONBs (Hampshire, East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove). The SDAF objectives were to examine the strategic and local issues for the whole of the South Downs and advise the four constituent LAFs on access issues affecting the South Downs in their particular areas. It was acknowledged that the LAFs might have issues which they would wish SDAF to consider and it was therefore important that meeting dates should be arranged to accommodate this.
43. The Forum noted that 20 members had been appointed to SDAF, one representative from each LAF and sixteen were appointed following public application. The appointments were made by a selection panel consisting of officers from the constituent local authorities, the Countryside Agency, the Sussex Downs Conservation Board and the Strategic Access Officer (representing the East Hampshire Joint Advisory Committee). It was acknowledged that the terms of reference for SDAF would need to be agreed by the highway authority LAFs in due course. Forum members urged SDAF to consider holding their formal meetings in public.

RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

44. The Forum considered a report outlining the background to the Plan which all local highway authorities were required to produce by 2005, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. At the last meeting of the Forum on 10th June, 2003 members had been asked to advise the Rural Strategy Team of any issues they wished to inform the development of the Plan and these were reflected in the report. Roland Seber referred to a questionnaire that had been devised to seek views from a variety of Rights of Way users. It was proposed to send the questionnaire to user groups, district and local councils and copies would be available in libraries and on the County Council's website. He urged Forum members to publicise the questionnaire through any user groups with which they were associated. It was proposed that the

questionnaire would be despatched in mid October with a response date of December 2003. The results of the consultation would be reported to the next meeting of the Forum in January 2004.

45. Forum members were asked to submit any views on omissions or additions to the questionnaire to lisa.creaye-griffin@westsussex.gov.uk or by telephone to Roland Seber on 01243 756863 by 3rd October, 2003. A number of points were raised at the meeting including space on the questionnaire for any complaints or particular comments by landowners/farmers. There was a need to find out why people used the countryside and this should also be reflected in the questionnaire. A category for carriage drivers should also be included in the user groups and it was particularly important to obtain views of less able users.

AGENDA FOR THE NEXT MEETING

46. The agenda for the next meeting will include:
- a discussion on the DEFRA guidelines on the functions of the local highway authorities enabling and managing open access under Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000;
 - a progress report on the establishment of the Coastal, Low Weald and High Weald Sub-Forums and the South Downs Access Forum; and
 - feedback from the questionnaire on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

46. The next meeting of the Forum will be held at 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 20th January, 2004 at Capron House, North Street, Midhurst.

CHAIRMAN