

DRAFT

SOUTH DOWNS ACCESS FORUM

A sub-forum of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex, the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum, and the East Sussex, and Brighton & Hove Local Access Forums

Sussex Downs Conservation Board HQ, Ford

11th February 2005

Meeting Minutes

Present

Members:

Andrew Shaxson (AS)	Derek Cleaver (DC)	Leo Hickish (LH)
Ben Perkins (BP)	Glynn Jones (GJ)	Malcolm Walford (MW)
David Ashcroft (DA)	Janyis Hyatt (JH)	Nigel Sloan (NS)
David Brookshaw (DB)	Jon Willis (JW)	Sue Montila (SM)
David Taylor (DT)		

SDAF co-ordinator:

Keith Tyrell (KT) : South Downs Access Forum Officer

Observers:

Jane Noble (JN) : West Sussex CC
Nicola Redwood (NR) : Strategic Access Officer for the South Downs
Phil Belden (PB) : Countryside Manager – Sussex Downs Conservation Board
Andrew Whitnall (AW) : East Sussex Local Access Forum Officer
Petronella Natrass (PN) : Hampshire CC
Tim Squire (TS) : Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum Officer

Public:

four

Apologies

Craig Thomas	John Rennie (JR)
James Sharpe (JS)	Kuljit Randhawa (KR)
John Godfrey (JG)	Paul Millmore (Pm)

Item	Minutes	Action
1	<p><u>Introductions and apologies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GJ introduced Jane Noble to the Forum. Jane has taken over from Roland Seber as the officer for the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex. Other aspects of her job include co-ordinating the RoWIP for West Sussex and dealing with CRoW Access Land in the County. • Apologies were received from six members (see above) 	
2	<p><u>Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>Glynn Jones informed the Forum that one of the routes proposed for discussion under item 6 <i>Feedback from RoWIP subgroups and discussion of recommendations</i> was on land owned by the National Trust for which he had responsibility.</p>	
3	<p><u>AOB</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KT informed the Forum that the Annual Report has been printed and circulated. 4500 copies were produced at a cost of under £600. They have been distributed to subscribers of the South Downs Focus, and have been given to the Mother Forums. JW objected to the use of the phrase “off-roaders” to describe motorised vehicle users. It was agreed that in future they will be referred to as motorised vehicle users. • KT drew the Forum’s attention to the recent consultation document published by WSCC for its local transport plan. While the consultation refers to Rights of Way in its preamble, none of the questions address this area. The Forum asked KT to write a letter to the CAFWS asking it to urge WSCC to give more prominence to Rights of Way and countryside access issues in its consultation. • KT informed the forum that he had received replies to the Forum’s letter to Alun Michael (action 2, meeting 6, 29.10.04), and to the forum’s letters to the Mother Forums (action 1, AGM, 8.12.04). HCAF and CAFWS will both be discussing the issue of LTP and RoWIP co-ordination at their next meeting. • KT informed the Forum that this was his last meeting as Forum Officer as he will be leaving post at the end of February. A new forum officer will be recruited as soon as possible. In the meantime, Nicola Redwood will be taking on the duties of Forum Officer. 	KT
4	<p><u>Minutes of last meeting and matters arising</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the AGM were passed as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting</p>	
5	<p><u>Open Access Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Progress on installing infrastructure:</u> KT provided the forum with an update of the progress in installing infrastructure to facilitate access to Access Land in the Sussex Downs. The work is being done by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board on behalf of ESCC and WSCC. The work has been divided between the four Area offices of the Board. KT revealed that the Central Area expects all infrastructure to be in place by the end of February, but around 10% of landowners changed their minds about the type and/or amount of infrastructure they will accept. In the Northern Area, nearly all parcels of access land are open and the information panels are being made. The only hold up is at Chapel common where the Rangers are waiting for permission from the Secretary of State to erect some fencing. Similarly, the Western Area is nearly complete. All major areas are open, just a few minor sites remain. There has been a delay at Springhead escarpment due to problems with fencing, but this should not hold 	

	<p>things up too much. Infrastructure is going in smoothly in the Eastern Area, but as in the Central Area, a handful of landowners have changed their minds. NS suggested there may be a role for the Forum to begin a dialogue with reluctant landowners to see what their concerns are and how they can be addressed. Legal action should be a last resort. DA, DT, DC and LH said that there were many possible reasons for farmers changing their minds: it could be concern over the risk of stock escaping, or a misunderstanding of the type of access on offer (i.e. self-closing kiss gates or stiles – not just field gates) or even general opposition to CRoW as a result of the ban on hunting and the Government’s poor relations with rural communities. BP suggested that farmers be made aware of the legal powers the Access Authorities have to open up Access Land. GJ pointed out that farmers have a lot on their plate at the moment with the reform of the CAP and other developments. Open Access is low on their priorities and it may just be that given time they will come round to doing something. DT suggested that the NFU and CLA be brought on board, and offered to contact some of the reluctant farmers directly to find out what their concerns are and to try to address them. He also asked that the forum consider how to lobby Defra about securing a higher incentive for access in the new agricultural subsidies regime being developed. LH also pointed out that only a relatively small number of landowners have refused access and in fact most land will be open by the end of March – this is a major achievement. KT to find out how many farmers have changed their minds and provide details to DT. SM expressed concern that funding for the new infrastructure might come from the Rights of Way budget. She felt it was unfair that other users (like horseriders) would be penalised through less maintenance of the network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Options open to local authorities to secure access to Access Land:</u> Christine Luff of WSCC spoke to the Forum about the options open to Access Authorities to secure access to Access Land. She explained that Access Authorities can serve notices on landowners to secure access if an agreement which has been previously reached has not been abided by or if it has proved impossible to reach an agreement. The Landowner may appeal, but it is not clear yet how these appeals will be dealt with. The erection of false or misleading notices discouraging users from accessing access land is also an offence and should be dealt with by a magistrates court. CL revealed that WSCC has allocated no extra resources to the legal department to take forward any action against recalcitrant landowners. However, she said that one option would be to write to all landowners who have not taken advantage of the Countryside Agency’s Access Management Grant Scheme and make them aware of the legal options open to the Access Authority to secure access to their land. If that fails, WSCC could consider taking forward one test case. Some members agreed with the letter approach, but LH suggested that the personal approach would be better as even carefully and diplomatically worded legal letters can be perceived as threatening. BP asked that the Access Authorities also emphasise the incentive in the form of funding that is being offered to secure access. AS then asked CL about the situation at Telegraph House. This is an area of Common Land of around 300 acres. It is enclosed by high deer fences topped with barbed wire. and there are numerous signs discouraging access. NR added that on a recent visit she noticed a number of new signs using the Open Access symbol and explicitly stating that there was no access to the land. CL revealed that WSCC has been in contact with the landowner, but that the landowner is currently contesting the designation of her land under human rights legislation 	KT
--	--	----

	<p>and on the ground that it should be excepted land. She said that it is generally WSCC policy not to take action where legal action is pending, and that it would be extremely reluctant to get drawn into the argument. NS proposed that the Forum asks the CAFWS to ask WSCC to take action to address the situation at Telegraph House beginning with a request to remove misleading signs. This was seconded by AS, and carried 7 votes for, 1 against with 5 abstentions. KT was asked to write a letter to CAFWS passing on this request.</p>	KT
6	<p><u>Feedback from RoWIP subgroups and discussion of recommendations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Hampshire</u>: DA told the Forum that a joint RoWIP working group of the SDAF and HCAF has had 2 meetings so far. Document 4 contains a note of that meeting. DA highlighted the fact that the working group has been advising HCC on what questions to ask users and landowners and who to ask. Their view is that it is better to approach farmers earlier rather than later. The group has so far concentrated on issues rather than specific routes. BP said he though the model adopted by HCC was impressive, but he wondered how specific routes and improvements could be included. PN explained that the group (and others) would be able to propose specific routes. • <u>Brighton & Hove</u>: DB told the forum that B&HCC have seconded an officer from its transport dept. 1 day per week to work on its RoWIP. The RoWIP is being developed under the overarching theme of health. There will be a draft plan in July this year. The B&H LAF has set up as subgroup to examine the RoWIP. It has already met twice this year, the SDAF working group for B&H met in January – see document 3. DB said lots of work has been done already and he felt it was important that this is reflected in the RoWIP. For example, B&HCC has an extensive list of missing links and these should be in the RoWIP. In his view, the SDAF has an important role in helping identify other sources of funding, and in ensuring cross boundary co-ordination – 4 of the missing links identified cross into WSCC area, and 16 go into ESCC. PB noted that LTPs gained extra points for demonstrating co-ordination with neighbouring authorities and this was one area they could clearly demonstrate this. DB asked KT (and his replacement) to ensure that all routes suggested by working groups which cross a boundary or impinge on a neighbouring authority are included on the maps and submissions to all of the authorities concerned • <u>East Sussex</u>: LH gave feedback of the ESx working group held in December (see Document 2). In short, the group met and considered nearly 150 specific routes. They then whittled down this list to 12 priority routes based on a set of four criteria developed by the group: public safety, missing links, circular routes, and routes along desire lines which can solve problems with trespass. However, the group felt that all of the routes had merit and they will all be passed on to ESCC for consideration. DT highlighted a general principle agreed y the group that any new route should avoid passing through farmyards or close to farm buildings. This would go a long way to placating farmers and make them much more likely to accept the proposals. The Forum endorsed the recommendations and agreed that KT should pass on the report of the meeting with the full list of recommendations to ESLAF for consideration and recommendation to ESCC. • <u>West Sussex</u>: NS reported back to the forum on the Meeting of the CAFWS RoWIP working group and the work of the SDAF WSx working group. The CAFWS met in January and focused mainly on the issues to be considered in the RoWIP. It was felt that the four headline issues identified by WSCC were too 	<p>KT</p> <p>KT</p>

	<p>narrow and needed to be expanded. In this respect NS asked KT to prepare a paper drawing together the issues being considered by the other authorities and the Strategic Access Plan for the South Downs being prepared by SDCB and EHJAC. AS asked that providing alternative to using the car should be a priority in all RoWIPs. In December, members of the SDAF WSx working group marked recommended routes on a set of OS maps. Unfortunately, these maps were lost in the post. Members of the group have marked up a second set of maps, but have not had a chance to prioritise any routes. In the meantime, KT has received a number of suggested routes from a parish council and other interest groups. KT was asked to organise a meeting of the WSx working group to prioritise routes and consider submissions from external bodies.</p>	<p>KT</p> <p>KT</p>
11	<p><u>Agenda items for next meeting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to water – presentation by Revd. Douglas Caffyn • Examples of local distinctiveness in the South Downs • Inclusion of non-CRoW access land on OS maps • Ethnic Minorities and the Countryside • Feedback from RoWIP sub-groups • West Sussex policy on TROs 	
11	<p><u>Dates for next meetings</u></p> <p>The forum agreed the meeting dates for a year in advance. The dates agreed were:- Friday 6th May 10.30 – SDCB HQ, Ford Friday 15th July 10.30 – SDCB HQ, Ford Friday 23rd September 10.30 – SDCB HQ, Ford Thursday 1st December (AGM) – time and venue TBC</p>	

Summary of Actions from meeting 8

<i>No.</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Who by</i>
8.1	KT to write a letter to the CAFWS asking it to urge WSCC to give more prominence to Rights of Way and countryside access issues in the consultation for its Local Transport Plan.	KT
8.2	KT to find out how many farmers have changed their minds about installing infrastructure on Access Land and provide details to DT	KT
8.3	KT to write a letter to CAFWS to ask WSCC to take action to address the situation at Telegraph House beginning with a request to remove misleading signs.	KT
8.4	KT (and his replacement) to ensure that all routes suggested by working groups which cross a boundary or impinge on a neighbouring authority are included on the maps and submissions to all of the authorities concerned	KT/NR
8.5	KT to pass on the report of the ESx Working group meeting with the full list of recommendations to ESLAF for consideration and recommendation to ESCC.	KT
8.6	KT to prepare a paper drawing together the issues being considered by the other authorities and the Strategic Access Plan for the South Downs being prepared by SDCB and EHJAC.	KT
8.7	KT to organise a meeting of the WSx working group to prioritise routes and consider submissions from external bodies.	KT