

South Downs

Local Access Forum

**12th January 2012, 10.30am, at Arundel Town Hall
Maltravers Street, Arundel, West Sussex, BN18 9AP**

Minutes

Present

Members: Glynn Jones GJ (Chair), Sue Dunkley SD (Vice Chair), David Ashcroft DA, Val Bateman VB, Dave Brookshaw DB, Bob Damper BD, Andy Hannaford AH, Simon James SJ, David Taylor DT, Jo Taylor JT, Tom Tupper TT

Apologies: Neville Harrison NH, Terry Doyle TD, Roger Mullenger RM, Pat Neal PN, Andrew Thomas AT, John Vannuffel JV

In attendance: Laura Warren LW, Engagement Officer, SDNPA; Allison Thorpe ATh, Access and Recreation Strategy Lead, SDNPA; David Livermore, Hampshire Roamability; Martin Gilchrist MG, Natural England

Secretary: Tim Squire TS, Rights of Way and Access Officer, SDNPA

Observers: Alison Perry HCC, Tricia Butcher, CAFWS; Andy Beattie AB, SDNPA Parkwide Manager; Robert Cheesman RC, ESLAF; Brian Bailey BB, Sussex Ramblers; Phil Belden PB, SDNPA Operations Director; Alan Marlow AM HCAF; Bill Tomlinson BT, 4Sight; Anna Tomlinson AT, 4Sight; Jane Aston JA, 4Sight; Diane Marks DM, 4Sight

1. Welcome

GJ welcomed all present to the fourth meeting of the SDLAF.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the meeting 13th October 2011 were agreed as an accurate record.
Outstanding actions:

Matters arising: BD raised the fact that Item 2 (Action 5) from the July minutes to discuss Winchester end of South Downs Way (SDW) was not on the agenda as suggested. TS explained that negotiations with landowners were on-going but slow. Andy Gattiker, SDW Officer, hopes progress will allow him to bring this item to the July 2012 meeting.

3. Management Plan

a. LW gave a presentation on Postcards for the Future 2011 Engagement. One of the aims of this exercise was to embed the inevitability of change: i.e. the Park will be subject to change over time and cannot be preserved as it is today. LW pointed out that well over a quarter of the comments received related to Access. GJ asked if LW

was disappointed with the amount of cards returned, but LW explained that 10% return on a survey is very good and that the exercise was just one piece of evidence towards the National Park Management Plan (NPMP) and Local Development Framework (LDF). DT felt it was interesting to see a focus on rights of way maintenance rather than access land. This was felt to be a reflection of the small amount of access land in the park in comparison with the extensive RoW network. PB felt that the strength of this data lay in it being unsolicited responses from everyday people, not those with a specialist interest being formally consulted.

b. ATh gave a presentation on the Autumn Workshops, highlighting the emerging themes and objectives relating to Access and Recreation. ATh thanked those members who had attended the workshops. JT said that she had enjoyed the workshop she attended and that the facilitation was excellent!

c. The Special Qualities paper has now been published. GJ made one comment and that was that while he couldn't disagree with or improve upon them they are not specific to the South Downs and could apply to all NPs. PB agreed but said that the final result was a reflection of what people felt was special about the South Downs.

d. ATh reported on the State of the Park Report and said that the NPA's Strategy Leads were currently preparing draft chapters which will be set out around the Special Qualities. Special Quality 5 would cover Access and Recreation. JT pointed out that the chapter on Tranquillity would also be of interest to the LAF. DB suggested that the LAF be given the opportunity to comment on the draft State of the Park Report at a future meeting. TT felt NPA officers were best placed to decide which parts of the State of the Park Report to bring to the LAF for consideration.

Action 1. GJ and TS to agree how to cover engagement on the State of the Park Report at the next SDLAF meeting.

4. Open Access

a. South Downs Society access maps launch

TS introduced the first set of South Downs Society maps showing open access land will be launched on the 30th March 2012 in Wilmington. All LAF members are invited to attend this press launch event. A discussion followed and a number of members commented on the style and content of the maps, SD stated that the style of the maps with text printed on coloured background would make them difficult for the visually impaired to read. A downloadable Word document is preferable to a PDF for users with visual impairments. JT suggested cafés could be added and TT felt it would be useful to distinguish between access points on the boundary and gates and stiles within the access land. TS said it was too late to make any changes in time for the launch, but that these issues could be addressed in the next 12 months and on future map publications, which would include sites in the western Downs.

Action 2. TS to send details of launch to members.

Action 3. LAF members to send any additional comments to TS to forward to the SDS.

b. Making sense of Access Land

TS re-iterated the fragmented, diverse and challenging topography of the access land in the South Downs. He asked members to think about how this provision could best be utilised and whether there ways to improve access land and access to it. GJ suggested that the LAF might like to consider how to resolve some of the anomalies around access land. DB felt that some areas of access land could be opportunities to fill in missing links in the network. DA stressed it was important to involve landowners at the earliest stage in any discussion around plans for access land. GJ said the LAF, with its mix of land owners / managers, users and other interests, was the ideal organisation to help find negotiated solutions.

Action 3. LAF members to submit any ideas for improvements, specific or general, to access land provision to TS to collate.

Break – During the break the Memorandum of Understanding between the SDLAF and the four LHA LAFs was signed.

5. South Downs Way, Meon Valley Consultation

TS presented on the South Downs Way temporary routes across the Meon Valley, through Exton. TS explained that the designated route of the SDW was not available and asked the LAF for their thoughts on the alternative temporary route. He asked; have there been any problems with the temporary route; and, would the LAF support the continued use of the temporary route? The LAF discussed problems and advantages of the route including use of roads, pub in village, flooding and steep slopes preventing multi-use and signage. They considered the possibility of a third alternative. DB asked who on the steering group is dealing with this temporary route? PB said that the SDW Steering Group is SDNPA, Natural England and the three LHAs statutorily responsible for the rights of way that make up the route through the three counties. The reason for bringing the issue to the LAF is to input into the review set up to assess the success or otherwise of the temporary route. AM said that the ramblers had not been consulted. GJ asked the LAF if they supported the continued use of the temporary route? **The LAF agreed that the temporary route was a good alternative, but urged the NPA and others to continue to pursue a multi-user route.**

Action 4. GJ/TS to feedback to Andy Gattiker, SDW Officer, with LAF recommendation.

6. Easy Access

a. Presentation

David Livermore from Hampshire Roamability gave a presentation about countryside access for mobility vehicles and tramper users. DL explained that stiles and certain types of kissing gates made routes inaccessible for mobility vehicles and that some kissing gates did not have enough space to manoeuvre the tramper. He added that trombone latches were preferred for gates, but DT said that cows can actually open these gates with their heads. DL said that while a large tramper like his can get across cattle grids, smaller mobility scooters are unable to. DL mentioned a scheme that is working on the Isle of Wight and in the Chilterns called 'Donate a Gate'

where people leave money in their wills or donate funds in memory of loved ones for new gates to replace old stiles. DL said it was very important for disabled users to know where barriers such as steps and stiles are located and would like to see them marked on maps.

Jane Aston from 4Sight Ramblers raised issues about the difficulties experienced with guide dogs in relation to stiles and cattle. PB suggested groups can plan and share their routes, and said that SDNPA rangers can help with this with local knowledge and contact details for local farmers.

b. Examples of good practice

TS gave out some example of leaflets about easy access routes. It was agreed that if people are given maps and other sufficient information they can make decisions for themselves about whether paths are suitable for them to use.

Action 5: TS to send weblinks to Easy Access maps, (BHCC, WSCC, SDNPA)

7. Cross Forum Business

- a. Memorandum of Understanding was signed (see Break above)
- b. TS circulated letter SD wrote. The letter supported the fencing of an area of Telscombe Tye to allow for management for grazing as assurances for fully accessible gates to be installed were made at a meeting with the Town Council. East Sussex LAF withdrew it's original letter of objection to fencing as a result in favour of the SDLAF response as the now statutory LAF for the area.
- c. Communication between TS & other LAF secretaries is developing into a good working relationship.

Action 6. TS to write to other LAF Secretaries to formalise.

- d. Proposals by Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) to fence Ebernoe Common may block a route identified by WSCC as a G-road, which is a route that is not presently legally defined as a highway but may carry public rights. Also, plans to fence Graffam Common will need to be advised on.

Action 7. GJ and TB to talk to SWT and report back and invite SWT and WSCC to next LAF if necessary.

- e. Apologies sent by Terry Doyle. Report to follow.

Action 8. TS to circulate TD report.

- f. New Forest & South Downs Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid. Draft sent out for consultation. DBr said it was important for LAF to respond as a single body. GJ encouraged all members to respond.

8. Defra and Natural England

a. Martin Gilchrist from Natural England gave presentation on the new Huddle, the web tool for LAFs to communicate with NE, Defra and each other nationally. At the moment only a restricted number of people can register but hopefully in the future it will be accessible to all.

Action 9. GJ to register and report back to LAF

9. AOB

DBr reported the deletion of the post of Countryside Manager at B&HCC. This was held by Hugo Blomfield whom DBr praised for achieving lots of good work on RoW and countryside access. Also Access Officer and RoW Officer posts deleted. DBr said this was of concern locally for the future of RoW and access work and was also worried that Access and RoW would be seen as easy area to make cuts by other authorities.

Action 10. GJ to write to BHCC (lead officer and member) with a copy to the NPA to stress the importance of maintaining good quality management of RoW in this highly popular, well-used part of the South Downs.

Action 11. GJ/SD/TS to agree strategy for ensuring good links and attendance at SDLAF by relevant local highway authority officers, including encouraging them to put up agenda items of relevance to the LAF.

Next Meeting: 10.30 a.m., 24 April 2012, venue to be confirmed

Future meeting dates: 17 July 2012, 9 October 2012, 22 January 2013

Appendix I: Note of Workshop on Added Value on RoW and Access.

The SDLAF meeting was followed by a workshop on the subject of Added Value on RoW and Access.

In attendance: Glynn Jones, David Ashcroft, Val Bateman, Phil Belden, Patricia Butcher, Dave Brookshaw, Simon James, Jo Taylor, Allison Thorpe, Tom Tupper

The purpose of the workshop was to investigate the ways in which Access and RoW within the SDNP can be managed to maximise the benefit to all users of the Park. The role of the SDNPA to help “add value” to the work carried out by the local highway authorities and other partners was discussed.

The group discussed various issues to be addressed in considering the management and improvement of RoW and Access, and gave specific examples to illustrate these. These included:

- Condition and monitoring of RoW
- How the LAF can help identify priorities
- Setting standards
- Creation of a Bridleway connection from the A24 underpass at Washington to the wider RoW network towards Storrington
- Cycling facilities at Amberley
- NPA as exemplar

- Improving accessibility for disabled
- Benches, picnic tables, art installations, though note landscape sensitivity

The group agreed a set of principles which encompassed Added Value:

1. Upgrading of RoW e.g. a footpath to a bridleway
2. Removal of stiles
3. New routes that provide links between other RoW or other existing routes, including improvements that provide safe off road routes
4. Enhanced facilities and visitor experience e.g. appropriately sited and sensitively designed benches and other resting places, picnic or bbq facilities, cycle hire, art installations
5. New cycle routes
6. Improvements that bring benefits to the rural economy e.g. higher rights on a route will bring more visitors, signage to village facilities.
7. Enabling volunteers to contribute to RoW and Access work e.g. surveying and reporting

Action 1: TS/PB/ATh to feed notes from meeting into process developing RoW and Access Accord

Action 2: TS to ask LHAs and Area Teams to help to narrow list of collated improvement projects from RoWIPs/CAP, which are held on South Downs-wide spreadsheet, to 3 from each area.