

South Downs Local Access Forum (SDLAF) – Meeting Notes

Date: Monday 10 February 2025

Time: 10:30 – 12:30

Location: South Downs Centre Hall, Midhurst, GU29 9DH

Attendees

LAF Members:

Andrew Shaxson (AS), Tim Burr (TB), Doug Jones (Chair) (DJ), Bob Damper (BD), Carolyn Fair (CF), Roger Mullenger (RM), Simon James (SJ), Glynn Jones (GJ)

SDNPA Officers:

Andy Gattiker (AG), Ben Marsh (BM), Ashia Ciesielczuk, Amy Tyler-Jones (ATJ), Lewis Ford (LF), Alex Pringle (AP)

Guests:

Jonathan Woods (JW)

Apologies:

John Vannuffel, Richard Johnson, Robert Whitcombe

<p>1. Welcome & Apologies</p> <p>Noted above.</p>
<p>2. Items for AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Hampshire updates (Jonathan Woods, HCC)○ West Sussex infrastructure issues○ County Council liaison○ Upcoming MOD meeting
<p>3. Notes of previous meeting</p> <p>All previous actions were completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AG had circulated East Hampshire LCWIP consultation and response coordinated.• AG had shared PMP presentation and Hampshire County Council's draft CAP.• All members received relevant materials.
<p>4. South Downs National Park Update</p> <p>AG provided a general update from the National Park Authority, making the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laura Sercombe's contract extended to support the Partnership Management Plan (PMP)• Awaiting DEFRA budget confirmation; working on a flat cash basis• No cuts planned, though delivery remains tight• Ben Marsh introduced as the new Rights of Way and Access Officer, now main LAF contact• Ongoing consultations for the Local Plan Review and the PMP—members encouraged to comment

5. Membership

DJ gave an update on membership:

- Current membership stands at 13, though some members haven't attended for some time.
- Recruitment to focus on underrepresented themes: health and wellbeing, climate change, nature recovery, and disability access.
- Noted a geographic imbalance, with most members from the western side of the park.
- Preference expressed for in-person over hybrid meetings, though rotating locations and varying timings could improve accessibility.

Actions:

1. **BM to contact inactive members to confirm their interest in continuing.**
2. **BM to advertise for new members with relevant interests.**

6. LAF Terms of Reference

AG reported that:

- Compliance generally good, though no Annual Report was submitted last year—this will be rectified for 2024.
- Questions raised about the audience for the Annual Report—DEFRA or Natural England?
- Report seen as valuable for reflecting on achievements and providing evidence if scrutinised.
- No limit on terms; members can be reappointed every three years.

Actions:

3. **BM to circulate the Terms of Reference.**
4. **BM to work with DJ to produce and submit an Annual Report.**
5. **AG to clarify report usage and audience with Siôn McGeever.**

7. South Downs Local Plan Review

ATJ, AF, and AP gave an update on the Local Plan Review, points of note were:

- Current plan (2019) performing well, but under review to stay up to date.
- Regulation 18 consultation open until 17 March.
- Plan maintains allocation of 250 new homes/year, with 48 new sites.
- Policies SD19, SD20, SD21 relevant to LAF remit.
- Key themes: access, nature recovery, and connectivity.

Actions:

6. **Submit a LAF response to the Local Plan Review.**
7. **Contact parishes receiving new allocations to encourage access improvements.**

8. Consultations

BM provided an overview of the current consultations that the LAF had been asked to respond to, which included:

- **Hampshire CAP** – LAF has responded; formal consultation expected later this year.
- **Surrey ROWIP** – LAF has responded.

- **Winchester City LCWIP** – Additional to district-wide plan; SDNPA advocated for new route connecting station to South Downs Way.
 - Green bridge over M3 not currently part of plans, but remains a long-term aspiration under nature recovery.
 - Connectivity and wildlife movement remain key concerns.
- **PMP Review** – Ongoing stakeholder engagement; linked closely with the Local Plan.
- **East Sussex ROWAP** – There is no revised improvement plan available to comment on as yet, BM had already shared consultation questions with the LAF.

Additional discussions on:

- Inclusion of public transport providers in PMP consultation.
- Poor signage and landowner cooperation in East Sussex.
- Noted variation in quality between counties.

Actions:

8. Submit responses to Winchester City LCWIP and East Sussex ROWAP

9. Key work coming up

AG provided an update on the plans to develop a Local Cycling and Walking Plan (LCWIP) for the South Downs National Park. Notable points raised were:

- Active Travel England (ATE) supporting national parks to improve active travel infrastructure.
- SDNPA's Cycling and Walking Strategy (2017-2024) will be refreshed to develop the LCWIP, aiming for a deadline in May.
- Focus: connectivity, key gaps, barriers, circular routes, and alignment with other local plans.
- Stakeholder event and online consultation planned.
- Examples include Worthing-Washington route, Centurion Way, Egrets Way, Rother Valley Way.

Discussion points:

- Maintenance concerns—need to plan for long-term upkeep, not just capital works
- Demand for circular rather than linear routes.
- Importance of aligning with public transport for multi-modal connectivity.
- Suggestion to review New Forest's LCWIP for insights.

Actions:

9. Circulate notes from New Forest LCWIP meeting

10. Share consultation link when available

10. AOB

Hampshire CAP and Byways Policy

JW gave an update on the Hampshire CAP and Byways Policy, points of note were:

- Updates on Hampshire CAP, byways, and LCWIP approach.
- Byway management includes seasonal closures and possible restrictions to prevent damage.
- Focus shifting away from costly surfacing towards closures during adverse conditions
- Emphasis on hierarchy of users—non-motorised access prioritised.
- New survey method being trialled to assess and manage route condition.
- New policies almost finalised; issues in National Park recognised.

Key concerns raised were:

- Maintenance decline could lead to route closures.
- Equine access often unmet.
- Material choices for repairs should reflect the local environment.

Liaison with County Councils

DJ updated the group on efforts to get Local Authority Rights of Way Managers to engage with the LAF, points raised were:

- Local Authorities often unable to attend meetings—alternative ways to engage needed.
- Suggestion to collect info on PROW management, maintenance, and parish engagement across counties.
- Opportunity to ask questions now due to potential Local Government restructuring
- Importance of addressing declining access due to budget constraints.

Actions:

11. DJ & RM to draft and circulate list of questions to County Councils

12. Members to provide questions for the upcoming MOD meeting

11. Matters for the next meeting

To include:

- MOD access feedback.
- Progress on SDNP LCWIP.
- Updates from County Council engagement.

6. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 21 May 2025, 10:30 – 12:30