

South Downs

Local Access Forum

22 April 2015, 10.30am, at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Present:

Members: Roger Mullenger RM (Chair), Sue Dunkley SD (Vice-chair), Glynn Jones GJ, Bob Damper BD, John Vannuffel JV, David Brookshaw DB, David Taylor DT, Isabel Swift IS, Neville Harrison NH, Russell Cleaver RC, Val Bateman VB, Susan Thompson ST

Apologies: Simon James SJ, Andy Hannaford AH, Richard Johnson RJ, Jo Carr JC

In attendance: South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Officers: Trevor Beattie TB - SDNPA CEO, Phil Belden PB - Director of Operations, Tim Squire TS - Rights of Way and Access Officer, Allison Thorpe AT - Access & Recreation Lead, Andy Gattiker AG – SDW Officer

Minute Taker: Emma Stanbury ES, Support Services Officer, SDNPA

Observers: Val Rawlings – Hampshire Countryside LAF, Bob McLellan – Hampshire Countryside LAF, Patrick Wallace – East Sussex LAF, Tricia Butcher – West Sussex LAF, Will Furze – BHCC, Chantelle Hoppe – BHCC, Camilla Bushill – Network Rail, Paul Donald – Network Rail, A.D. Jones – Buriton Parish Council, Sam Wright

A. Welcome and Minutes

1. Welcome

Roger Mullenger welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Factual accuracy:

The previous minutes were agreed.

Matters arising:

DB will be the SDLAF representative at the meeting on 12 May with E.On regarding the laying of underground power cables through the National Park from the offshore wind farm. DB will be focussing on the impact on RoW.

AT reported that the joint SDNPA/BHCC bid to the DfT for an extension to the Cycling Ambition programme was successful. An additional £450,000 was awarded to upgrade the Drove Road, an existing Byway in poor condition, to link with the Woodingdean – Falmer Path. The work, which was identified in the B&H RoW Improvement Plan, will be completed by September 2015.

Actions from previous minutes:

Action 1: The response from the Chief Executive of BHCC to a letter from the SDLAF regarding the suspended BHAF was circulated. There is an intention to re-start the BHAF with a Councillor chairing the initial meetings and then handing over to a chair elected from within the group as soon as possible. This will happen after the May election but in the meantime BHCC officers will attend the SDLAF.

Action 2: AT gave an update on LSTF funding for weekend bus services.

Action 10: RM completed an ESCC 'Future of Countryside Access' survey on behalf of the SDLAF. JV attended one of the stakeholder engagement meetings organised by Alice Henderson.

ACTION 1: RM to contact Cllr Woodward on behalf of the SDLAF requesting an update on the Hampshire Cycling Strategy.

ACTION 2: Charlotte Weller (WSCC) to send a link to the finished web page (Prioritisation of RoW Maintenance Works) to TS who will circulate it to the SDLAF

[This action has been carried over from the previous meeting as WSCC's entire website is being upgraded so the web page is not yet available].

B. Key Topics for Discussion

3. LAF Annual Reports

RM and TS have drafted the Local Access Forum Annual Review Form for 2014/15 from Defra and the South Downs Local Access Forum Annual Report 2014/15.

ACTION 3: All SDLAF members are invited to read the Local Access Forum Annual Review Form and the draft Annual Report and let TS know of any amendments/additions and in particular for the Annual Report, any relevant photographs to add

RM explained that if SDLAF members would like to represent the views of the SDLAF at meetings or on boards they should first be formally appointed by the SDLAF.

GJ proposed that DB should be made a formal SDLAF representative the Green Infrastructure Working Group. This was seconded by RC. Agreed – DB appointed as a SDLAF representative on the Green Infrastructure Working Group.

ACTION 4: All SDLAF members to let RM/TS know if you would like to represent the SDLAF on another board/at another meeting, so that a formal appointment can be made.

4. Towpaths – John Vannuffel

JV presented a paper: 'The River Ouse: Towpaths, Wharves and Herbage'. JV has researched the Lewes – Newhaven section of the river. JV asserted that towpath rights still exist along the river Ouse. This means that the stiles present are an obstruction to towpath rights. Although towpath rights are not exercised this could be a mechanism for removing the stiles.

A discussion was had about the stiles and gates in relation to both disabled access and stock control. The heritage aspect was discussed and also the fact that cyclists regularly use the footpath

TB thanked JV for the very interesting piece of historical work but suggested that the best way forward is to agree what works at present for the majority of people regarding gates/access.

ACTION 5: RM to meet with TS & relevant SDNPA staff to look at JV's work on the River Ouse, summarise the viewpoints into a statement and circulate it to SDLAF members with a proposal for the next meeting.

5. Rail Crossings

a) Buriton extinguishment – Camilla Bushill, Network Rail

Camilla Bushill (CB) said that Network Rail has applied to Hampshire County Council to extinguish the footpath crossing near Buriton on safety grounds. Reasons include poor sighting of approaching trains, close proximity to a children's playground and a history of incidents, including near misses with children and trespassers. CB said that a lot of research had been carried out into alternatives before applying for the extinguishment and that the rail line can be crossed via a 2 minute diversion onto a different path. Buriton Primary School has supported the closure whilst the Parish Council is opposed. She commented that only 8 out of 90 Network Rail crossings in Hampshire are being examined.

RM said that he attended the meeting with Hampshire County Council where the extinguishment was discussed and had objected to the process rather than to the extinguishment itself, as he felt that not all alternatives to closure had been considered. He added that in the report, HCC Officers had said that more alternatives to closure would need to be considered before confirmation of the order.

NH commented that RoW are very important for the National Park and any closures must be considered carefully. He added that 44 people had died in 5 years on crossings but 5-6 people a day die on the roads so it is important to accept and understand risk. Closure would not stop trespass and the solution is to make crossings safer e.g. with technology. GJ said that although Network Rail is the land owner, the access rights were already in place when they acquired the land. Farmers also incur risks to the public from their livestock, but aren't able to close RoWs. RC said that he had visited the rail crossing in Buriton and would personally support Network Rail's decision to close the crossing due to its location next to school playing fields

Cllr Jones from Buriton Parish Council said that they take safety very seriously but they also take RoW seriously. All Parish Councillors objected to the extinguishment of the crossing on the grounds that more research could be carried out. Since new gates have been put in there have not been any incidents. The Parish Council would like the alternatives to extinguishment to be further examined.

Any SDLAF response must be made within the consultation period.

It was proposed and seconded to vote on the SDLAF not objecting to the extinguishment of the Buriton crossing, i.e. taking no further action. Following a vote, the proposal fell.

It was then proposed and seconded to vote on the SDLAF objecting to the extinguishment of the Buriton crossing. Following a vote, the proposal was carried.

ACTION 6: RM to write to HCC in response to the extinguishment order within the consultation period to object to the extinguishment of the Buriton crossing, on the grounds that more research is needed to thoroughly examine all of the alternative options to closure. [post meeting note: letter sent 01 May 2015]

b) Tidemills Closure and Bridge – Paul Donald

Paul Donald (PD) said that Network Rail is planning to close the Tidemills crossing which has high levels of misuse and is one of the highest risk crossings in the south east. A ramped and stepped footbridge situated 5 metres from the existing level crossing will be provided instead.

NH commented that Tidemills is a site of high importance to the National Park and the bridge will have a visual impact on the environment. DB suggested that Network Rail should attempt to make the design of the bridge as sympathetic as possible to the surrounding landscape.

TB agreed and added that Network Rail should be showing more consideration of the materials used and to the design of footbridges in National Parks and need to demonstrate this to the NPA.

c) Sheet Closure and Bridge – Camilla Bushill

CB said that the proposal for Sheet is to close the crossing and provide a ramped footbridge. Also to provide a car park to avoid traffic build up on School Lane.

RM said that in general, the SDLAF will not object to the closure of rail crossings where suitable alternative ways of crossing have been provided.

d) Newhaven next steps – LAF Discussion

DB questioned why 3 stiles have been installed at this crossing. This is an inconvenience for users and seems unnecessary.

CB replied that the stiles were installed on the advice of Network Rail's regulator ORR. RM commented that this is not stipulated in the ORR guidance.

ACTION 7: RM to write to ORR on behalf of the SDLAF to question the conflicting advice regarding stiles at rail crossings.

6. Kingley Vale – report back from members

VB had volunteered to review access and routes at Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve near Chichester and fed back her observations to the SDLAF. Access to Kingley Vale is via a footpath from a small car park. This is regularly used by bikes despite a sign which says no bikes allowed. The path is quite bumpy for wheelchair users.

Paths inside the NNR are Natural England's responsibility. Of the two paths running alongside the nature reserve, one is good, and the other is used for vehicles so is very rutted.

TS said that he would like to create a Miles Without Stiles route taking people into the reserve and hopefully improve the existing bumpy access track also. TS reported that in order to dedicate NE may be looking for restrictions to dogs due to livestock and deer management. SDNPA would need to make the restriction and SDLAF would be consultee. SDLAF supported the dedication and agreed that there were no opportunities for additional higher rights in this instance.

ACTION 8: TS to pass on views of the SDLAF and any submissions received from SDLAF members regarding Kingley Vale to Natural England

7. Shooting and Access Conflict – Susan Thompson

ST outlined a conflict of interest which has arisen in the Ouse Valley between a commercial shooting operation and other countryside users. There has been a recent increase in this area in intensive commercial shooting which has impacted on the local community's access to and enjoyment of the local environment. Local people have been reluctant to walk in this area due to coming into contact unexpectedly with shooters and ST was recently prevented from walking a a bridleway by 12 shooters.

DT declared an interest as the father of the Farm Manager where the shoot operates and commented that shooting is a legitimate pastime but must be conducted legally and with proper warnings or otherwise reported. He feels that this is not a matter for the LAF.

It was agreed that both land owners and countryside users need a greater understanding of each other's rights and requirements. Shooting guidance should be promoted more widely. The minutes of this meeting are to be passed to ESCC to alert them of possible problems on RoW in this area.

ACTION 9: Phil Belden will speak to the Eastern Area Rangers who will liaise with the relevant land owner/game keeper about positive public relations

ACTION 10: TS to pass minutes to ESCC and alert them to this discussion item

C. Updates and Information Items

8. SD National Park Authority Update

TS reported that the West Hove Golf Club is signing a Section 106 agreement regarding their creation of a large bund adjacent to the A27. This will involve lorries accessing the site over a 12 month period. Subsequently the land will be dedicated as Open Access and a bridleway will be created which will link two existing bridleways.

TS gave an update on Breaky Bottom. SDNPA had made a decision to make a new Direction to exclude the public for a further six years. The area of exclusion was smaller than previously due to fence lines preventing access to the chalk pit. The SDNPA will investigate if Lewes District Council will consider the chalk pit a public nuisance under The Mines and Quarries Act 1954 and take enforcement action. SDNPA will commit to 12 monthly re-assessments or a re-assessment at any time should circumstances change.

TB commented that it had been a useful site visit after the previous SDLAF meeting and good advice was received which informed the SDNPA decision.

Ruth James, Head of Communications for SDNPA gave an update on the Meon Valley Trail. HCC are leading on the upgrade of the trail. Concerns have recently been raised, particularly by horse riders, about the surface being used and that it would favour cyclists over horse riders. Andrew Lee attended a public meeting to explain that trail is intended to promote access for all users.

A meeting is being arranged with a smaller group of concerned users and it would be helpful if representatives from the SDLAF could join this group.

It was agreed that Bob Damper and Russell Cleaver would attend from the SDLAF. Val Rawlings also agreed to join the group.

9. Information from Members and Other LAFs

AG thanked the SDLAF for their feedback on the proposed alternative route for the SDW through the village of Rodmell. On balance the feedback suggested that SDLAF members supported leaving the route of the SDW unchanged. AG has placed the Rodmell route onto the website as a suggested alternative.

Tricia Butcher gave an update on the West Sussex LAF. On 28 January they held their AGM. Tricia stood down as Chair. GJ has agreed to chair the meetings but the group is looking to recruit another Chair and also to recruit new members.

RM attended a LAF Chairs meeting in London which was useful. The SDLAF is hoping to recruit another representative from land management since David Ashcroft has stood down. RM wished to express his thanks to David Ashcroft for his time as a member of the SDLAF. [Post meeting note: We are pleased to say that a Hampshire farmer has offered to be a member of the Forum. We will start the formal process of appointment].

GJ gave an update on the issue of access on the river Rother. The SDLAF continue to mediate between anglers and canoeists but are waiting to hear from the land owners.

Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates:

28 July 2015
27 October 2015
12 January 2016