

# South Downs

## Local Access Forum

26 April 2016, 10.30am, at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst

**Present:**

**Members:** Sue Dunkley SD, Richard Johnson RJ, David Taylor DT, Val Bateman VB, Bob Damper BD, Andy Hannaford AH, Robert Whitcombe RW, Neville Harrison NH, Roger Mullenger RM (from item 7)

**Apologies:** Susan Thompson ST, David Brookshaw DB, Russell Cleaver RC, Isabel Swift IS, Simon James SJ, Glynn Jones GJ, John Vannuffel JV

**In attendance:** South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Officers: Trevor Beattie TB - SDNPA CEO, Phil Belden PB - Director of Operations, Andrew Lee AL – Director of Strategy & Partnerships, Tim Squire TS - Rights of Way and Access Officer, Allison Thorpe AT - Access & Recreation Lead, Pete Shaw PS – Sustainable Transport Marketing & Campaigns Project Manager, Jenny Bowen – Natural England, Geoff Cook – Sussex Ramblers

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

**Observers:** Noel Humphrey – British Canoeing, Alan Marlow – HCAF & Ramblers, Robert Self – SDS, John Langford – Sussex Ramblers, Joanne Porter – Surrey CC/SCAF, James Emmett - HCC

### A. Welcome and Minutes

#### 1. Welcome

SD welcomed everyone and explained that as RM was at the Iping and Trotton Commons fencing Public Enquiry on behalf of the SDLAF, she would be chairing the meeting.

#### 2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

***Factual accuracy:***

The previous minutes were agreed.

***Matters arising:***

Officers gave updates; Sheet crossing - Network Rail had been planning to close the crossing and install a large footbridge, but instead will now install a double barrier crossing; discussions are still taking place between Network Rail and SDNPA about the design of the bridge at Tidemills; the Telscombe Diversion Order Proposal which the SDLAF supported has received no objections.

**Action 2 ongoing:** TS has requested data from NE on permissive paths made available through farm payment schemes. The ESLAF discussed the proposed extension of the SDW at Eastbourne and they have requested a site visit.

**ACTION 1: TS to inform the SDLAF when the site visit is taking place so that they can also attend if they wish**

JE explained that the consultation responses to the proposed ETROs were being considered by a consultant.

**ACTION 2: JE to report back to SDLAF on HCC course of action following consultant report on proposed ETROs.**

The proposed northern route of the A27 Chichester Bypass has been shelved, so the consultation timetable has been put back. It is to be hoped that in the future Highways England will involve the SDNPA at an earlier stage.

***Actions from previous minutes:***

All other actions from the previous meeting have been completed.

### B. Key Topics for Discussion

### **3. SDNPA Restructure. Implications for LAF and Access Work – Andrew Lee, SDNPA**

TB explained the main aims of the SDNPA restructure which are:

1. Bring together the operational and policy/strategy work to result in more integrated working.
2. Increase efficiency – delivering work more effectively. National Parks have been told they need to become less reliant on public money in the future.
3. Bring new skills into the organisation.

The SDNP has been in existence for 5 years and the Authority is moving from a formative stage to a delivery stage. There will be no change to the amount of support for the SDLAF or to the SDNPA's commitment to the SDLAF. The change from old structure to the new structure will take place on 1 June.

AL said that access is very important to the NP and the Authority would like the SDLAF to continue to work well. Although Tim's post is not in the new structure, the functions will continue within the organisation. There will be 4 teams each combining some strategy issues and an Area Team of rangers. The Managers will be Nigel James, Andy Beattie, Vicky Lawrence and Nick Heasman. The access portfolio will be in Nigel's team. Allison Thorpe, Andy Gattiker and Ben Bessant will continue to be involved with the SDLAF. Also the Lead Rangers and their teams will continue to be closely involved with access work. New Assistant Ranger posts have been created which are still to be filled. The new structure will be circulated on 1 June.

#### **ACTION 3: AL to circulate new structure chart 01 June 2016**

AL thanked TS and PB for their support for the SDLAF over the years.

SD questioned who would now be the main link between the SDLAF and the SDNPA. AL replied that it will be Nigel James initially.

### **4. England Coast Path – Jenny Bowen, Natural England & Geoff Cook, Ramblers**

Jenny gave a presentation on the England Coast Path, a new National Trail being created by Natural England. Natural England must aim to strike a fair balance between the private interests of landowners and the public's rights to enjoy open-air recreation on coastal land. The new right of Coastal Access brings in 'roll back' meaning that if a section of coast erodes or slips, the path isn't lost, it simply moves back with the new coastline.

The aim is to create a long-distance walking route all around England's coast by 2020. Certain categories of land are 'excepted' from the coastal access rights but in most cases an 'access strip' can be agreed. Where the Coast Path meets other National Trails (i.e. the SDW) there will be dual signage. Progress is being made, the section between Camber and Folkestone is nearly open and will be available this summer.

There is a great deal of talking to landowners/stakeholders before proposals for a section of the path are put before the Secretary of State. Nature conservation and landscape interests are also considered. There is an 8 week period for objections and representations.

Approximately 15km of the SDNP will be part of the route but the exact details are not yet decided. Some local features will include Cuckmere Haven and Telscombe Cliffs. The lead adviser is Dave Pearce and he would welcome comments/input from the SDLAF.

VB asked whether higher rights were being considered. Jenny replied that landowners could be approached about higher rights once the route has been agreed. Accessibility for all users is being considered, but it's not always possible to achieve this.

Geoff Cook talked about the Shoreham to Eastbourne stretch of the England Coast Path. He and John Langford from the Sussex Ramblers have walked the route and are submitting a report to NE.

The route is already well established. However, there are some safety concerns, for example the Exceat Bridge presents some risk to walkers and should be improved. At the Seven Sisters Visitors Centre there are concerns about the safety of pedestrians at the A259 crossing. And at the Cuckmere Estuary it's possible that part of the Vanguard Way may be lost if the Cuckmere Estuary is allowed to flood, so there may need to be a re-routing of the England Coast Path.

In response to questions JB explained there is no compensation available to landowners, there is a right of appeal to the Secretary of State against the proposed route and that surfacing works may be carried out but the route will in most cases will follow what is on the ground.

## **5. Department for Transport Cycling & Walking Investment Strategy Consultation – Allison Thorpe**

The ambition is to 'normalise' walking and cycling – reversing the decline in walking activity and increasing cycling activity, making them a natural choice for people in England. AT has been to a briefing on this consultation and has worked through the strategy, noting the following key points:

- There is no *new* money to implement this strategy
- Access Revenue Fund (DfT) – promotion and enabling money
- LEPs are responsible for the Local Growth fund – smaller areas are concerned they won't be able to make the case for this money
- There are few actions or targets relating to walking

Actions are focused around 3 quite urban themes.

AT is putting together a consultation response on behalf of SDNPA. The SDLAF may wish to respond as a group or as individuals. Suggestions and evidence of innovative projects and programmes are being sought. The consultation closes on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and there are 2 roadshow events.

BD commented that the biggest barrier preventing people from cycling more is safety concerns around traffic and the strategy doesn't deal with this.

Alan Marlow is happy to share a draft HCAF response.

**ACTION 4: SDLAF Members to email TS with any information they would like to be included in the response.**

## **6. Dealing with ESCC Countryside Strategic Commissioning Consultation – Tim Squire**

East Sussex County Council is starting a consultation on its draft Countryside Access Strategy. It's a proposed plan that looks at how public rights of way and countryside sites will be managed in the future.

PB highlighted the key points: ESCC would like to pass sites over to those who can manage them more effectively; but would like to RoW to remain in-house; maintenance of the RoW network is mentioned but there is no reference to improvements.

The consultation will run from 6 May to 29 July so a response from the SDLAF will need to be agreed at the July meeting.

**ACTION 5: SDLAF members to agree who would like to be part of a virtual working group to write a draft response which can be brought to the SDLAF meeting on 20 July.**

## **C. Updates and Information Items**

### **7. National Park Authority Update**

#### **a) Share The Path – Pete Shaw, SDNPA**

Pete is the Sustainable Transport Marketing & Campaigns Project Manager for SDNPA. The Share the Path campaign has been devised to promote positive use of shared paths within the South Downs National Park. While research showed that incidents of conflict are rare, it also indicated that there can be negative perceptions about different user groups. Consultation was carried out, which included consultation with SDLAF members, and the key message was that people need to interact with one another to break down barriers. Postcards were produced highlighting the key messages, 'street teams' reached nearly 10,000 people and much use was made of social media. The main campaign was launched over the Easter holiday.

There was positive media coverage and positive comments from the public. There was also a generally positive reaction on social media, including retweets. The Daily Mail presented a distorted view of the campaign but a balanced discussion took place on radio and in national media. The film was widely shared, with around 53.5k views. SDNPA's stakeholders also widely shared the campaign message. It's likely that the campaign can be used again in the future.

RW commented that specific interactions which could be an issue weren't mentioned, such as dogs not on a lead, or the damage caused by 4x4 drivers. Pete replied that they decided to begin with a core message, that the countryside/paths are a shared space. But there is scope in the future to target particular users.

DT asked how much money was spent on the campaign. AT replied that it was £34k from the LSTF which is a revenue fund. AL commented that the NP are trying out a variety of different methods to influence people's behaviour but that behaviour change is difficult to measure.

#### **b) Iping and Trotton Common Public Enquiry – Tim Squire**

RM had been attending the enquiry on behalf of the SDLAF and would be giving a presentation on access the following day. He reported that there will be many access points.

### **8. Defra and Natural England Business**

#### **a) National Conference Feedback – Bob Damper**

There was a variety of workshops and talks. The most inspiring talks were on barriers to disabled access and working with disadvantaged children in Yorkshire. Other subjects included recreational vehicles and a stakeholder's guide to influencing Local Authorities. Over all it was an interesting day and worth attending.

#### **b) Defra 8 Point Plan for National Parks – Andrew Lee**

The Defra 8 Point Plan was launched at Butser Ancient Farm during a visit from Liz Truss, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The three overarching themes are: Inspiring Natural Environments; Drivers of the Rural Economy; National Treasures.

Defra is developing a 25 year plan for the environment and the National Parks are well placed to feed into this.

### **9. Information from Members and Other LAFs**

#### **a) HCAF Report Including ETROs**

RM attended the HCAF meeting on 15 March and raised the subject of ETROs which had been discussed at the last SDLAF meeting. However, he was given the impression that they are not a priority, even though consultation has been carried out to produce a list of potential ETROs. The production of an Equestrian Strategy was suggested by HCAF following the production of strategies for other user groups. The HLF funded PATHH Project was discussed which aims to discover former paths, where there exists a need for a path today.

#### **b) Public Transport Update – Richard Johnson**

There have been further losses of bus services in the B&H area. The Mon – Fri Devil's Dyke and Stanmer Park services have been lost. Ditchling Village has lost all of its weekend bus services so there is now no way of getting there sustainably. Breeze buses are continuing. AT said other parts of the National Park were also set to lose services as a result of reduced funding. It was suggested an audit of gaps in bus service provision across the NP in the future might be a useful exercise.

#### **c) Feedback from other LAFs**

There was no further feedback.

#### **d) Chairman's report – Rother Update**

RM and GJ met with managers of The Cowdray Estate and The Leconfield Estate to discuss canoe access on the river Rother. Both Estates believe that no public right of navigation exists today and they reject any suggestions that there may be a residual right surviving from the Navigation Act. However they were both open to being approached for agreement to canoe on their parts of the river for specific events, particularly the Cowdray estate. Barlavington Estate responded to support the view of the meeting.

RM questioned whether the SDLAF should continue to actively pursue this. Noel Humphrey replied that he felt it would be useful. RM said that he is prepared to be present at a meeting between British Canoeing and the Estates. It was agreed that British Canoeing would arrange a meeting and invite RM.

### **10. AOB**

RM expressed his thanks to TS for his role as RoW and Access Officer and for acting as a link between the SDLAF and the SDNPA. He also wished to thank PB for his attendance and input at the SDLAF meetings.

#### **Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates:**

20 July 2016

21 October 2016