

South Downs

Local Access Forum

12 January 2016, 10.30am, at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Present:

Members: Roger Mullenger RM (Chair), David Brookshaw DB, Russell Cleaver RC, Richard Johnson RJ, David Taylor DT, Val Bateman VB, Bob Damper BD, Isabel Swift IS, Simon James SJ, Andy Hannaford AH, Glynn Jones GJ, John Vannuffel JV

Apologies: Sue Dunkley SD, Susan Thompson ST, Robert Whitcombe RW, Neville Harrison NH

In attendance: South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Officers: Phil Belden PB - Director of Operations, Tim Squire TS - Rights of Way and Access Officer, Allison Thorpe AT – Strategy Lead Access & Recreation, Andy Gattiker AG – South Downs Way Officer (Item 5), Lara Southam LS – Local Plan Lead & Dan Ashe DA – Planning Policy Officer (Item 7)

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

Observers: Val Rawlings – Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF), Bob McLellan – HCAF, Noel Humphrey – British Canoeing, Graham Butler – SCAF, Michael Clarke – ESLAF, Robert Self – South Downs Society

A. Welcome and Minutes

1. Welcome

Roger Mullenger welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Factual accuracy:

The previous minutes were agreed.

Matters arising:

TS gave an update on the progress of the Multi User Paths Research Project. The research proposal has been sent to local universities, SDNP volunteers and is on the SDNPA website. Universities with relevant specialisms have been particularly targeted. The Hampshire Access Forum were planning a very similar project and have agreed to include their project within the SDNPA research spec if a student can be found to carry out the research.

ACTION 1: RM to circulate the Hampshire Access Forum's proposal to the SDLAF

RM demonstrated the 'Walks and Rides' page of the Natural England website where you can search for details and maps of walks, rides and areas of open access provided under the Countryside Stewardship, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Environmental Stewardship Schemes. Under the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme the funding which used to be available for access improvement has gone and therefore the permissive paths network may be lost.

ACTION 2: RM/TS to approach Natural England to ask whether the data provided on the Walks and Rides web page is available as tabular data, rather than in a searchable format

The data from Natural England could allow the SDLAF to look at all of the permissive paths within the SDNP and consider which may be priorities to be continued.

ACTION 3: TS to circulate the link to the Natural England website to the SDLAF

Graham Butler said that permissive paths on the IOW are being considered to ascertain whether access might be allowed to continue once the HLS scheme has finished. Landowners have been approached and some permissive paths have been accepted as RoWs.

Actions from previous minutes:

All actions from the previous meeting have been completed.

B. Key Topics for Discussion

3. Hampshire Byways Traffic Regulation Order Consultation – John Vannuffel

TS summarised an email from HCC's Countryside Access Team which proposed Traffic Management on two BOATs of relevance to the SDNP, in Worldham and Selbourne. These routes had been under temporary closure due to significant surface damage. Repairs have recently been carried out and the routes will remain closed whilst the surface repairs settle in. They will then be reopened gradually to one type of use at a time – first to walkers, then cyclists, then horses and finally motorised vehicles – to allow the impact of the increasing use to be monitored.

In addition, the Council is proposing to implement an Experimental Traffic Order (ETRO), the effect of which will be to prohibit use of the route by all motorised vehicles, except for those who have applied for and been issued with a permit by the Council. HCC had been inviting views or comments on the proposals.

JV said that a well thought out permit scheme would be welcomed by the Trail Riders Association, following an informed consultation. But there needs to be a differentiation between motorbikes and 4x4 traffic. JV was not aware of any evidence to suggest that motor bikes had caused any issues on this route. In Kent a 4x4 permit system has been successful using a gate with a lock and key code. A gate could be used which wouldn't affect horse riders or motorcyclists but would prevent 4x4 vehicles. Carriage drivers would need to be given codes for access. JV suggested that "recreational" towing by 4x4 vehicles should be prohibited. BD put forward that perhaps the Water Lane route should be considered for closure in winter due to the wet nature of the route. GJ suggested that during the research stage, 4x4s and motorbikes should be separated to assess the erosion caused by each type of vehicle.

ACTION 4: RM/TS to write a response to the proposals and circulate a draft to the SDLAF

4. Telscombe Diversion Order Proposal – Dave Brookshaw

DB referred to a letter received from East Sussex County Council regarding the proposed diversion of public footpath Telescombe 12A at Portobello Treatment Works, Telescombe Cliffs. The SDLAF agreed that the suggested diversion appears to be a good compromise. DB suggested that when the formal diversion is made, the SDLAF could write in support of it.

5. South Downs Way Eastbourne Extension – Andy Gattiker

AG gave an update on the SDW. He reported that, in general, outstanding issues on the SDW are reducing. However, the wet winter has caused some issues, e.g. flooded sections in the Meon Valley. Equipment has been loaned by Google to Streetmap the SDW. This will allow people to see the Trail and to assess whether it's suitable for them to walk or ride. Walk Unlimited have put a donation button on the National Trails website for the SDW which has raised £120 in donations so far and should increase during the busier spring and summer seasons. £1000 has also been raised from events which took place on or around the SDW last summer.

AG requested feedback from the SDLAF on a proposed Eastbourne extension to the SDW and regarding the location of start and finish markers for the route. The City Mill in Winchester which is owned by the National Trust is looking like the best location for the marker at the western end of the Trail. The Eastbourne end was extended a few years ago to a better finish/start point with a nearby car park, but some parties would like it to be extended down to

the sea at a location which is easier to find. There was general support from SDLAF members for the City Mill to be the official start/finish point in Winchester. Views on the possible extension of the Trail into Eastbourne were more varied; it would be better for public transport and people finding it, but it would be outside of the National Park and for some users, e.g. horse riders, going into a town would be prohibitive.

C. Updates and Information Items

6. National Park Authority Update

a) Local Plan – Lara Southam and Dan Ashe

LS and DA provided an update on the Local Plan Preferred Options consultation which has just closed. They thanked the SDLAF for their response and talked through the points raised by the SDLAF and how they would be incorporated into the Local Plan. The revised Local Plan document will be consulted on in autumn 2016 and the representations received will be submitted to the government inspector in February 2017, along with the version of the Local Plan which is being written at the moment. Adoption of the Local Plan is being aimed for by summer 2017.

b) A27 Improvement Proposals – Andy Beattie

AB reported that details of the proposed improvements to the A27 near Chichester can be found online. A public consultation on the proposals will take place in spring 2016. The SDNPA will be making a response based on its agreed position statement, particularly with reference to the impacts on the Special Qualities which were identified as a necessary part of designating the National Park. If the SDLAF wishes to make a response it will need to have prepared something for its next meeting on 26 April which is likely to be right at the end of the consultation period.

ACTION 5: SDLAF members to look at consultation and co-ordinate a draft response for 26 April meeting

c) Rampion – Dave Brookshaw

DB reported that works have been going ahead as planned.

d) Proposed Works Iping and Trotton Common – Roger Mullenger

RM said that the SDLAF has already written in support of Sussex Wildlife Trust's proposal to fence Iping and Trotton Commons to improve the habitat. If no action is taken, due to the management demands of this habitat, the heathland may be lost. Many access points have been included in the proposal and they include mounting blocks for horse riders. RM will speak at the public inquiry, if available.

e) Railway Crossings

RM provided an update on the proposed extinguishment of the footpath crossing near Buriton by Network Rail. He will put forward at the inquiry that the considerations for alternative access were inadequate.

PB said that the SDNPA is in discussion with Network Rail over their bulk-standard bridge designs, such as their proposal for the bridge at the Tidemills crossing, near Seaford. The Design Review Panel has requested a design which is more in-keeping with its situation within the National Park.

f) Centurion Way

AT reported that the Centurion Way opened on 22nd December 2015.

g) Worthing Downland Dedication

TS reported that approximately 80 hectares of new access land has been dedicated by Worthing Borough Council adjacent to Cissbury Ring connecting with the existing access land there. The land is being grazed by a tenant farmer with cattle.

h) Pony Disabled Access

There will be a demonstration of a special pony cart which enables any wheelchair user to access rough terrain on 19 January at Devil's Dyke. Simon Mullholland from Pony Access will be giving the demonstration: www.ponyaccess.com

ACTION 6: TS to email SDLAF members with a reminder of the date of the demonstration and the web address

[post meeting note: see news item on [SDNPA website](#)]

i) SD GI Framework Technical Working Group

The draft South Downs Green Infrastructure Framework is being circulated for informal consultation until 29 January 2016. The case for a South Downs GI Framework emerged from public consultation in February 2014 on options for the South Downs Local Plan. AT explained that all local authorities have contributed to the development of this framework and evidence has been gathered over a long period of time.

GI is most at risk, from development, in areas just outside of the National Park. Strategic sites of GI will be identified.

7. Defra and Natural England Business

The National Conference is taking place on 23 February in Bristol. RM and BD plan to attend.

8. Information from Members and Other LAFs

a) Feedback from other LAFs

Graham Butler gave an update from Surrey CAF. Unfortunately there has been a drop in the number of members of SCAF. The work of SCAF has mostly been concerned with cycling recently, many major cycling events take place in Surrey. The Local Authority RoW maintenance budget has already been cut and further cuts are predicted. As a result, some bridges have been closed which has affected RoW.

Michael Clarke gave an update from East Sussex LAF. They have also experienced problems with recruitment of LAF members. ESLAF have produced a Byway leaflet which is on the East Sussex website. They carried out a site visit to the river Ouse towpath and support JV's work on this.

DB reported that the Brighton & Hove LAF has a new Chair and is receiving good support from officers. However, 60% cuts have been proposed for the Countryside Department and Ranger Service.

b) Rother Letter

RM gave an update on the investigations into access on the non-tidal section of the River Rother. They have not yet been able to personally contact all of the landowners so have produced a

letter to go to all identified riparian landowners. IS commented that many landowners will pass a letter of this nature onto their agents and as it would take time for the agent to deal with, it would incur a cost for the landowner. SDLAF members suggested amendments to the draft letter.

ACTION 7: RM to circulate an amended version of the letter to SDLAF members before sending to the landowners

9. AOB

VB says that she is aware of a bridleway which the local highway authority wishes to convert to a Byway Open to all Traffic (Bridleway 3405, Park Lane, Stansted Park). The local Bridleway Club has spent time and money on trying to improve it. It is joined by a permissive path which was going to become a bridleway, but if the conversion of Bridleway 3405 to a BOAT takes place, the landowner will not agree to the permissive path becoming a bridleway.

ACTION 7: VB/SM to circulate the information to TS/RM

RJ said that bus services in rural areas continue to face challenges. This has an impact on people in towns and cities who want to access the countryside, especially those who don't have a car. He suggested that potentially, commercial sponsorship of essential bus services between towns and the countryside could be a way forward. AT is going to meet with RJ to discuss this. The SDLAF would support this work where appropriate.

AT said that the Local Sustainable Transport Fund is ending soon. The DfT has indicated that further funding of this nature should be available in the future, but there will be a gap. Bus operators don't seem to be keen to run the services, e.g. Sunday services, without the funding.

Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates:

26 April 2016
20 July 2016
21 October 2016