

South Downs

Local Access Forum

13 January 2015, 10.30am, at The Keep, Woollards Way, Brighton, BN1 9BP

Present:

Members: Roger Mullenger RM (Chair), Sue Dunkley SD (Vice-chair), Glynn Jones GJ, Bob Damper BD, Simon James SJ, Andy Hannaford AH, John Vannuffel JV, David Brookshaw DB, David Taylor DT, Richard Johnson RJ, Isabel Swift IS, Jo Carr JC, Neville Harrison NH

Apologies: Russell Cleaver RC, Val Bateman VB, Susan Thompson ST, David Ashcroft DA

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 Beattie AB – People and Places Manager, Andy Gattiker AG – SDW Officer, Alice Henderson AH – East Sussex County Council, Charlotte Weller CW – West Sussex County Council

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

Observers: Graham Butler GB – Surrey Countryside Access Forum, Robert Walker RW – Brighton & Hove City Council, Robert Cheesman RC – South Downs Society, Michael Clarke MC – East Sussex LAF, Roger Foxwell RF – ESLAF, Graham Flatt GF – Hampshire Countryside Access Forum

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:

RW gave an update on the issue of parked cars at Stanmer Park at times preventing the bus service from accessing the Park. The SDLAF letter on this subject was received by the Chief Executive of B&HCC. There is an intention to introduce off street parking orders in the summer, which has been successful in other areas, but this will depend on political support after the election.

RW also reported that the SDLAF letter regarding the suspended Brighton & Hove LAF unfortunately did not reach the Chief Executive. However, RW has raised the issue of the suspension of the BHLAF and the Chief Executive's Office has said that they will respond to TS on this matter. TS confirmed the letter had been resent. DB commented that the LAF is in need of officer as well as secretarial support and that it is a statutory duty.

ACTION 1: TS will follow this up and ensure that a response is received from the Chief Executive of B&HCC and if a letter from Natural England was also sent.

[Post meeting note: NE letter sent 17.12.14]

Actions from previous minutes:

Action 1: RM has arranged a meeting on 21st January between British Canoeing, Petworth and Bognor Angling Club and Arun & Rother River Trust to discuss riparian access on the River Rother, which RM and GJ will be facilitating.

Action 2: The Botley to Bishop's Waltham Bridleway Project are trying to secure agreements from Southern Water and Network Rail about crossing their land. Once they are sufficiently confident that their project has a reasonable chance of success they will produce a Statement of Support that the SDLAF and HCAF can consider.

All other actions are complete.

A discussion took place on the cuts to bus services within the SDNP. Hampshire has just made large cuts to its bus services which will affect the National Park. The service from Winchester to Petersfield through the Meon Valley is under review until the summer. Surrey is currently reviewing its bus services. AT commented that it doesn't make sense to use LSTF money to fund a Sunday bus service if the Saturday service has been cut. She has been meeting with Tourism Officers to try and help maintain some weekend services in the National Park.

ACTION 2: AT to report back on outcomes of forthcoming discussions with Local Authorities regarding LSTF funding for weekend bus services.

B. Key Topics for Discussion

3. Hampshire County Council Countryside Access Plan Review

It was agreed that the document summarised the position of the SDLAF well and that the comments were well captured.

ACTION 3: RM to clarify position on "list of streets".

ACTION 4: JV to write to Defra (with a copy to HCC) on behalf of the SDLAF to suggest that ORPAs/UCRs should be included in the scope of RoWIPs

TS commented that the public consultation will finish before the next meeting of the SDLAF.

ACTION 5: TS to circulate the link to the draft CAP, once it becomes available, for comments from SDLAF members and for RM and TS to produce a consolidated response from the SDLAF.

TS gave an update on the Cycling Strategy. Consultation on this strategy will take place in spring/summer 2015. BD reported that Cllr Woodward will be shortly making a decision on the delayed Hampshire Cycling Strategy.

ACTION 6: RM to write to Cllr Woodward on behalf of the SDLAF (before 20th January) expressing concern at the delay and to express support for a Cycling Strategy.

4. Breaky Bottom Access Land Restriction Review

TS explained that SDNPA is the body responsible for making decisions on restrictions and exclusions on open Access Land mapped under the CRow Act. The restriction at Breaky Bottom is due for review. The SDNPA is consulting the statutory consultees including the SDLAF. The SDNPA has delegated its power to make these decisions to the Chief Executive of the SDNPA, Trevor Beattie in consultation with the Chair of Policy and Programme Committee.

TS gave an overview of the Breaky Bottom site, both in terms of its characteristics and the history behind the decision to make the restriction. Further discussion about the site would take place during the afternoon's site visit.

ACTION 7: All SDLAF members to pass their comments onto TS following the site visit, who will then circulate a synopsis to the SDLAF

5. South Downs Way – Andy Gattiker, SDW Officer, SDNPA

AG gave an update on improving the SDW route into and out of Winchester City Centre following a meeting with MoD representatives and contractors (Landmark). In principle the MoD did not have any issues with the proposed route adjacent to the firing range, however, the final decision is dependent on a computer model which assesses the safety of the area. Changes in the use of the range requires further modelling which will be carried out at some point in 2015

to ensure there is no possibility of ammunition reaching the bridleway. Therefore, at present, the bridleway remains within the danger area.

AG also met with Winchester City Council regarding the start/end point and improving signage for the SDW out of the city.

a) New Proposed Route through Rodmell

AG gave a presentation on the proposed new route for the SDW through the village of Rodmell rather than through the village of Southease. He talked through the pros and cons of the proposed route. Advantages included: passing through the pleasant village of Rodmell which has a pub; crossing the road at a safer point where the traffic is slowed; a section along the river; easier route for cyclists and horse riders as it avoids a particularly steep and uneven section. Disadvantages included: missing the pleasant village of Southease where there is a SDW water point; concerns over the speed in which cyclists may enter the village of Rodmell down a tarmacked slope where there are pedestrians passing and cars reversing out of driveways; the section next to the river can become very wet as it is currently unsurfaced and on a floodplain.

AG would prefer not to split the route of the SDW as it causes confusion amongst the public and has issues from a trail management perspective. He posed the question to the SDLAF whether it is worth pursuing this possible alternative further?

ACTION 8: SDLAF members to email RM and TS with their views on the suggested SDW route change

b) New Management Plan Draft

AG circulated the draft South Downs Way Management Plan to the SDLAF.

ACTION 9: SDLAF members to feedback any comments on the draft Management Plan to AG or TS by the end of February 2015

6. East Sussex County Council Consultation “Shaping the future of our Countryside Access” – Alice Henderson, Project Manager – Strategic Commissioning, East Sussex County Council

AH gave a presentation on the work being carried out currently at East Sussex County Council to develop a long term strategy for countryside management across their sites. This will include setting a long term strategy for how rights of way are maintained. ESCC is currently running a consultation (until 20 February 2015) asking the public how they do or don't use RoW and sites: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/haveyoursay

ACTION 10: Local SDLAF members to complete the survey on an individual basis

[Individual survey here:

<http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/futurecountrysideaccess.htm>**]**

There is also a stakeholder survey for people involved in RoW and countryside sites, e.g. as a landowner, or perhaps representing a special interest group. Also, stakeholder engagement meetings are taking place in February. AH would like to spread the word about the consultation and encouraged members of the SDLAF to complete the survey.

SD, RJ and JV suggested that that they have contact with user groups (disability groups, public transport user and trail rider groups respectively) that should be involved in the consultation.

ACTION 11: ES to email SD, RJ and JV's contact details to Alice Henderson

DB asked whether the RoW Improvement Plan has been reviewed and will it be acknowledged and also the need to include the recording of “Lost Ways”. AH replied that her colleague

Andrew Le Gresley is preparing an update on what has been achieved with the RoW Improvement Plan and that he is also dealing with the recording of Lost Ways.

BD asked whether the consultation was making use of the national data which is already available on the health benefits of accessing countryside. AH confirmed that they are. RM suggested that they may be interested in RoW usage figures that the SDNPA already has.

ACTION 12: ES to send the RoW usage figures to AH

AH is working with colleagues in tourism to obtain data on tourists' use of RoW and countryside sites.

ACTION 13: TS to circulate the web link to the consultation page on ESCC website to SDLAF members as soon as possible.

C. Updates and Information Items

7. SD National Park Authority Update

PB gave an update on future funding opportunities for Stanmer Park. Stage one of the Stanmer Park 'Parks for People' HLF bid has been successful with a development grant of £291,000 awarded. This will enable Brighton & Hove City Council, along with the SDNPA and others, to develop detailed plans for the total bid of around £4 million. If successful, the money will be used to improve the park's historic landscape and protect its natural features. In less than a month we should learn the outcome of a Heritage Grant HLF bid of a similar amount to restore Stanmer's traditional Home Farm buildings. Practical work would not begin before 2017.

AT reported that the SDNPA together with BHCC were due to submit a bid to DfT for an extension to the Cycling Ambition programme. The additional funding was to improve Drove Road, an existing Byway in poor condition, to link with the Woodingdean – Falmer Path. The outcome of the bid was expected by the end of the month and if successful the scheme, which was identified in B&H RoW Improvement Plan, would be delivered before September.

8. Defra and Natural England Business

TS attended a Natural England Open Access Seminar and updated the LAF on NNR dedications and coastal access.

NE are half way through the dedication project for 76 NNRs. So far 6,779 hectares have been dedicated and that 51% of this was from two large sites.

Following an announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister, work to finish the English coastal path is now set to be completed by 2020, 10 years earlier than planned, with additional money being allocated to achieve this.

TS asked for volunteers from the SDLAF to complete an access assessment for Kingley Vale. SJ, RM and GJ volunteered. TS suggested that Val Bateman may also wish to volunteer.

ACTION 14: TS to contact volunteers with assessment sheet

TS confirmed that there will not be any money for access as part of the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

9. WSCC RoW Prioritisation Criteria – Charlotte Weller, Countryside Services Manager, West Sussex County Council

CW presented Appendix 6 – Prioritising maintenance works on Rights of Way in West Sussex, which sets out the process for identifying, prioritising and carrying out RoW maintenance works.

The WSCC inspection regime has moved from a 9 month to a 15 month cycle. Problem reports will be prioritised according to 2 key factors: level of impact and volume of complaints. Once a problem report has been assessed, it will be assigned a priority level from 1 to 5. In the future, there will be timeframes allocated to priorities. Deliberate obstructions to a RoW would be dealt with by the Enforcement team.

GJ asked whether a member of public would be told which priority had been assigned to the problem that they had reported. CW replied that it does not happen at the moment, but is a good idea for the future.

DB commented that there used to be SD volunteer parish path rangers who would go out and look at RoWs equipped with maps which had all of the 'furniture' marked on, e.g. stiles and signs. This made it easy to record where there were issues. CW said that there are plans to create similar maps with all of their assets marked, via a new electronic system, CAMS.

JV questioned whether volunteer gangs are able to carry out maintenance work independently when a need arises? CW replied that there is a member of staff who is responsible for running the volunteer days and who needs to be present when volunteers are carrying out maintenance work. Around 25 days per year are carried out.

RM said some unsafe stiles should be included under health & safety heading, and that promoted routes should be listed.

ACTION 15: CW to send a link to the finished web page to TS who will circulate it to the SDLAF. It is due to go live in February 2015.

10. Information from Members and Other LAFs

Graham Flatt reported that the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum has similar concerns to the SDLAF, for example, cuts to bus services. He hopes that all of the LAFs can work together on building a dialogue with the MOD about access issues.

GB said that the Surrey Countryside Access Forum is in the process of creating a cycling strategy which now includes off-roading.

MC said that the ESLAF is trying to take action against dog fouling.

GJ reported that the biggest issue facing the WSLAF is recruitment, both for new members and the role of Chair. Work on the Downs link is awaiting spring for completion. Their AGM is on 28th January.

Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates:

22 April 2015
28 July 2015
27 October 2015
12 January 2016