

South Downs

Local Access Forum

15 October 2014, 10.30am, at South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Present:

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

Apologies: Neville Harrison NH, Isabel Swift IS, Susan Thompson ST, Jo Carr JC, 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. Sebastian Anstruther SA – Chairman, Arun & Rother Rivers Trust (ARRT). Paul Eslinger PE – Chairman, Southampton Angling Trust SE Forum. Roger Poole RP – Chairman, Petworth & Bognor Angling Club. Stephen Simmonds SS - Petworth & Bognor Angling Club. Kevin East KE – British Canoeing. Noel Humphrey NH – British Canoeing. Robert Shields RS – Chairman, Botley to Bishop's Waltham Bridleway Project Working Group.

Minute Taker: Emma Stanbury, Support Services Officer, SDNPA

Observers: Charles Granlund CG – Local Midhurst Resident, Sue Montilla SM – Trails Trust, Graham Butler GB – Chairman, Surrey 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 with one alteration to item 6a). The initials 'DB' should be changed to 'BD'.

Matters arising:

There were no matters arising

Actions from previous minutes:

Action 1: An amended version of the Review form has been sent to Natural England and printed copies of the SDLAF Annual Report are now available at:

<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-involved/laf>

Action 4: A SDLAF letter of support for the Telscombe proposed diversion will be sent by 31st October. RM/TS [sent 23.10.14]

Action 5: TS has spoken to the Wiston Estate and is hopeful that an agreement can still be reached that will meet the needs of cyclists and horse riders. Further meetings will be held and TS will report back when there is an update.

All other actions are complete.

B. Key Topics for Discussion

3. Riparian Access on the River Rother

RM explained that the SDLAF has been asked to advise on the issue of riparian access for canoeists on the River Rother. A representative from both canoeing and angling interests had been invited to give a presentation to be followed by a Q&A session at the end.

Before that, Sebastian Anstruther, representing the Arun and Rother River Trust (ARRT), set out the Trust's position regarding the River Rother and disputed navigation rights. ARRT recognises that it is a complex issue and would like to see a negotiated resolution to the issue. It also recognises that it may not be seen as a neutral body by canoeists because of its close working relationship with landowners and anglers. Therefore the SDLAF may be more effective in helping to find a workable solution.

a) Kevin East, British Waterways and Environment Manager, British Canoeing

KE gave a presentation on Canoeing and Access on the River Rother. The presentation outlined the history of the navigation rights on the River Rother and set out the issues surrounding current access to, and along the river, from the canoeists' perspective.

b) Stephen Simmonds, Petworth and Bognor Angling Club

SS gave a presentation on Angling on the River Rother. The presentation outlined the angling organisations on the river, how they operate and the habitat improvements which the Petworth and Bognor Angling Club have made to its stretch of the Rother.

c) To note – Appendix 2. Navigation and Access Paper – previously presented to SDLAF January 2014

A Q&A session followed. DT asked if access were granted for canoeists, would that permit power craft to also gain access? KE replied that a robust management plan could determine what craft were permitted. JV commented that this could be set out in a legal document. SJ asked where the funding for improving the fisheries on the Rother had come from. SS replied that a small amount of funding and many volunteer hours had come from the angling club, but the majority was from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Catchment Restoration Fund and Environment Agency. JV asked how much canoeing actually takes place on the Rother. SS replied that there has been less activity this year than in previous years, and that the activity is only reported to him when there has been conflict. There were 30 incidents last year of canoeists moving through quickly without regard for the anglers. RM asked whether it would be helpful if canoeing only took place during the closed fishing season. SS said that this could be considered, but that there are specific areas where improvements have taken place which the anglers would prefer were undisturbed all year round. A discussion took place about the fact that anglers pay for the rights to fish stretches of rivers, so clubs can monitor and manage access to the river but that canoeing is not set up in this way, so users can't be monitored as closely – much as with walking which is self-regulated.

JV suggested that the Society of Mediators could be approached to mediate a fresh discussion between the interested parties. GJ suggested that a definitive answer can only be decided in court but that the LAF could offer to help negotiate a compromise agreement (which wouldn't damage any side's case should it go to court at a later date).

The LAF members agreed that until the legal position is resolved, the only way forward is to try and reach a compromise agreement. The LAF then recommended interested parties work with a professional mediator to determine whether canoe access can be agreed. Two LAF members (GJ and RM) also volunteered to attend any discussions.

ACTION 1: GJ and RM to attend a meeting with the interested parties and an independent mediator to attempt to reach a compromise over access to the River Rother.

4. Botley to Bishop's Waltham Bridleway Route – Robert Shields

RS gave a presentation about the work being carried out to create a new bridleway allowing pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists to travel from Bishop's Waltham to Botley without the danger of traffic. This is largely along the same route as a disused railway line. Robert is Chairman of the Botley to Bishop's Waltham Bridleway Project Working Group. The group is currently negotiating with landowners, and gaining support and funding from partner organisations.

The LAF members agreed that the SDLAF would like to add its name in support of the project.

ACTION 2: RS to provide a document stating that the SDLAF is in support of the Botley to Bishop's Waltham Bridleway Project which LAF members can agree to.

C. Updates and Information Items

5. SD National Park Authority Update

a) SDW Winchester and Birling Gap updates – Andy Gattiker

AG gave an update on SDW Winchester, with progress on an improved start / finish, via the water meadows and mill, to King Alfred's statue. He will be meeting with the MoD to look at the proposed route of the SDW across their land at Chilcomb, specifically whether the bridleway will impact on their firing range danger area. The date of this meeting has been put back twice by the MoD but hopefully once the meeting takes place, progress will be made.

AG reported that Birling Gap is proceeding well now that a new Rural Surveyor has been appointed at the National Trust.

AG will be taking the first draft of the South Downs Way Management Plan to the South Downs Way Trail Partnership. The East Sussex LAF suggested two improvements to the SDW route in East Sussex which AG will bring to a future meeting of the SDLAF.

b) Centurion and Meon Valley Trail Updates

AT thanked Robert Shields for his presentation and said that the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) is supporting a project in Bishop's Waltham which would link well with the proposed Botley to Bishop's Waltham Route.

AT reported that improvements to the Meon Valley Trail are currently being made and are on track. The work is being led by David Deane, cycling officer and funded by Hampshire County Council.

The Centurion Way planning application is likely to go to the NPA's Planning Committee in November. The landowner has recently indicated that equestrian access will be permitted on the route. SDNPA officers are to meet with West Sussex County Council to discuss potential for establishing its bridleway status.

VB commented that Chichester District Council, West Sussex County Council and the Parish Council are all in support of equestrian access. VB also said that she didn't agree with the contents of the letter which was sent from the SDLAF to the SDNPA Planning Department regarding the Centurion Way, as higher rights were not yet in place, but accepted that this had been the view of the last LAF meeting which she had not attended.

AT responded saying that bridleway status was not part of the planning process and the application concerned permission to build the route rather than any public rights of way status.

ACTION 3: SDLAF to write a separate letter to West Sussex County Council, copied into the SDNPA, saying that the route should be fully multi-user access.

SM questioned why the Centurion Way planning application had been called in by the SDNPA. TB explained that based on agreed criteria certain applications of particular interest or significance for the National Park are 'called in'.

RM suggested that SM should contact the planning department with any questions and advised that the documents will go onto the SDNPA website a week before the Planning Committee (13/11).

6. Defra and Natural England Business

a) Coastal Access Announcement

The target for completing coastal access around the British Isles is to be achieved by 2020 and the Isle of Wight will also be considered. The completion date has been brought forward.

7. Information from Members and Other LAFs

a) Public Transport – Richard Johnson

RJ reported that East Sussex County Council's bus budget is under threat, including weekend services. As well as impacting on long-established links used by local communities, the proposals could also affect the success of 2 Parks LSTF-funded weekend bus services, as these would suffer from reduced connectivity and a general public perception that weekend bus access to the countryside had become impossible

ACTION 4: SDLAF to write a letter to East Sussex CC to express concern over the threat to bus services within the National Park.

RJ also reported that the bus service into Stanmer Park is often being prevented from accessing the Park due to poor parking by other vehicles. The buses are unable to get through and this has left some bus users stranded, especially older and disabled people who cannot manage a long walk through the park to the main road bus routes. The LSTF is allocating some funding for new bus services into Stanmer Park on weekdays, in response to those who live, work, study and volunteer there.

RJ said that notices and yellow lines have been tried to prevent the problems with parked cars, but that this has not worked and therefore some sort of parking management and enforcement is needed, before the additional bus services start on 19 April 2015. PB said that at Devil's Dyke there had been a similar situation and it only took a few vehicles to be towed away for the problem to be solved.

ACTION 5: SDLAF to write a letter to the Chief Executive of Brighton & Hove City Council regarding the parking issue at Stanmer Park.

b) Feedback from Other LAFs

RM gave an update on the situation with the Brighton & Hove LAF which has been suspended. The SDLAF has drafted a letter to send to the Chief Executive of Brighton & Hove City Council which was circulated with the papers for this meeting.

DB commented that he is happy for the letter to be sent without further alterations, if it can be sent as soon as possible. The SDLAF was in agreement.

ACTION 6: RM to sign the letter to Brighton & Hove City Council and send it today [Actioned]

ACTION 7: TS to send a copy of the letter to the national and regional access leads at Natural England [Actioned]

RM reported that he attended the Rampion Workshop to discuss the planned underground cable network, beginning in May 2015. This will cut across 50 – 60 rights of way and temporary diversions will be put in place. There will also be some temporary closures for a short period of time, e.g. one day, and this information will be available beforehand on their website. RM will be kept up to date and will inform the SDLAF as appropriate.

RM, JV and BD also gave evidence to HCC members looking at the Hampshire Countryside Access Plan Review.

Next Meeting Date:

13 January 2015, The Keep, Brighton <http://www.thekeep.info/>