

South Downs

Local Access Forum

24th April 2012, 10.30am, at Lurgashall Village Hall

Present

Members: Glynn Jones GJ (Chair), Sue Dunkley SD (Vice Chair), David Ashcroft DA, Val Bateman VB, Dave Brookshaw DB, Bob Damper BD, Andy Hannaford AH, Neville Harrison NH, Roger Mullenger RM, Pat Neal PN, Simon James SJ, David Taylor DT, Tom Tupper TT, John Vannuffel JV

Apologies: Terry Doyle TD, Andrew Thomas AT, Jo Taylor JT

In attendance: Trevor Beattie TB, Chief Executive, SDNPA; Jane Noble JN, WSCC; Tim Squire TS, Rights of Way and Access Officer, SDNPA; Allison Thorpe AT, Access and Recreation Strategy Lead, SDNPA; Jane Willmott (SWT)

Minute taker: Claire Lloyd CL, Administrator, SDNPA

Observers: Tricia Butcher, CAFWS; Andy Beattie AB, SDNPA Parkwide Manager; Brian Bailey BB, Sussex Ramblers; Phil Belden PB, SDNPA Head of Operations

A. General Business

1. Welcome

GJ welcomed all present to the fifth meeting of the SDLAF.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the meeting 12th January 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising: none

Outstanding actions:

Action 8 is outstanding - TS to circulate TD report – still to do (post meeting note PATHH April 2012 Report sent with minutes)

Action 10 is outstanding – DB requested that this be completed sooner rather than later. TS has created a draft which DB would like to see before it is sent. (post meeting note - copy of letter sent 13.06.12 circulated with minutes)

3. SDNPA update

a. Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive SDNPA

TB introduced himself and expressed a wish to attend as many of these meetings as possible. He praised work completed to date (RoW network, Anniversary walks, launch of Access maps, etc) and stressed the importance of partnership. Trevor believes that to share the 'Accord of Genuine Partnership' is the right approach, and is keen to help manage out any external pressures (from the Highways Authority, for example). Trevor highlighted the success of the 'Bramber model' with its partnership between the SDNPA, VRS and WSCC working on the South Downs Way.

b. LHAs/NPA RoW and Access Accord

TS explained that it has taken 15 months to reach the stage where the Draft Accord is ready to be signed off. This is the first step to work in partnership with the Highways Authorities and the SDLAF will feed into it.

The group then discussed the Draft Accord. Line 1 of 'Introduction' - JV suggested that 'of paths' to be deleted and just keep it as 'network' .

BD endorsed the vision of the Accord and stressed the importance of encouraging a diversity of people to enjoy the Park. DB pointed out that this is the first time the SDLAF has had the opportunity to see the Draft Accord and that more detail is required – the Accord must interlink with the State of the Park Report (SOPR). He expressed concern with the SDNPA not having access to consistent data on RoW condition and how this can be rectified. He also expressed an interest in knowing more about what is happening on the ground and asked when will we get a report on access management. TB agreed that information is vital, that it is important to sign the Accord as soon as possible so that we have commitment from all parties, which the SDLAF can monitor. We will then be able to introduce reporting and review dates. TB also confirmed that the SOPR will have a strong evidence base and that it will link to up-to-date, online data. PB added that the importance of the Accord shouldn't be underestimated; it is essential that we monitor priorities, be creative and keep track of budgets.

JN invited all to the forthcoming Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS) meeting (25th April) where RoW annual report will be presented.

Action 1. RoW update at next meeting. TS/GJ

c. State of the Park Report

ATh thanked everyone for their contribution to the Recreation and Learning Chapter of the SOPR. She explained that the next draft will be slimmer, and that data sets will be available online. The report will be signed off in the summer and will be published this autumn. TB confirmed that one role of the SDLAF is to continually assess the use of the best measures and that we will be able to add in new online data sets as/when appropriate. GJ asked that we keep hold of the 'old' data too so that we can compare old with new. TB explained that the data will be "cemented" annually to report progress and feed into the Management Plan. DB expressed concern that the LAF will not have the opportunity to comment on the next draft of the SOPR.

d. South Downs Management Plan

ATh explained that the project timeline for the Management Plan had just been drafted and that there would clearly be opportunities for the LAF to be involved at every stage of the Plan.

Action 2; Update on SOPR and Management Plan at next meeting. ATh/TS/GJ (standing item)

4. Consultations

a. Queen Elizabeth Country Park Dog Control Orders

TS explained that any Dog Control Orders will now come to the SDLAF and thanked members for sending responses to email consultation. It is apparent that when looking at Access Land, many issues relate to dogs; there is an opportunity to give on-the-spot fines for walking more than six dogs, leaving dog mess and not keeping a dog on a lead, but it is challenging to 'police'.

DA highlighted the issues around sheep worrying on Winchester Hill. DT asked how legally binding the fines will be. Various members of the group highlighted dog related issues which they are concerned with across the National Park, including professional dog walkers, sheep worrying, the potential for licensing, and public awareness/education.

4. Defra and Natural England business

a. Regional Conference

22nd May in Euston, London. Places for four LAF members. DB intending to go.

Action 3: TS to e-mail invite.

b. Huddle feedback

GJ explained that only one member from each LAF can join. Tricia explained that Huddle costs money per user and that the Bristol office does not intend to register more users. The group agreed that it is a useful tool but that the same people seem to use it all the time, and that Huddle is maybe not the best tool for an active Forum to use. RM has set up a blog spot and a Twitter account and this may prove to be a more user friendly way of keeping in touch.

c. Other NE news

TS announced that a new Countryside Code has been published on the NE website.

Action 4: TS to send link out to LAF members

DB wants the SDLAF involved in future National Conferences.

Action 5: TS to send out Tricia's notes on the most recent conference.

6. Information items

a. Proposal for local Trails Trust branch, Tim Squire, SDNPA

Sue Montilla will come to the next meeting in July to present on her proposal for a local branch of the Trails Trust and is keen to involve the SDLAF. DB indicated that the 'old' South Downs Access Forum was given a presentation on this and requested that the brief at the July meeting is wider than before. DA explained that the Trails Trust work ties in well with the RoW Improvement Plans.

Action 6: TS to include Sue's presentation in July agenda

b. Ouse Valley Cycle Network, Neville Harrison, SDLAF member

NH invited members to the Linklater Pavilion in Lewes on 25 April, Nick Heasman (SDNPA) and Cath Hart will be talking about the Shipwrights Way as an example of similar scheme. Some money has been offered to Sustrans which will benefit the Kingston to Lewes part of the Ouse Valley Cycle Network. The Environment Agency will maintain the banks.

AOB

CAFWS GJ discussed the role of CAFWS in the Bramber by Pass and the group agreed that this should continue.

Action 7: GJ will circulate the recent CAFWS minutes.

.....**Break**.....

B. Key Topics for discussion

7. Promoted routes in West Sussex – Jane Noble, WSCC

JN gave a presentation on Promoted Routes and requested that the SDLAF consider 3 questions.

1. Should WSCC continue to support promoted routes on the county PROW network? SDLAF agreed 'yes'.
2. Should WSCC engage with promoters and managers of promoted routes to encourage good practice and high standards on these routes? SDLAF agreed 'yes'.
3. Does SDLAF support WSCC making clear the status of all PROW on promoted routes? SDLAF agreed 'yes'.

The group discussed these questions and issues around them, such as signage, colour coding, OS maps and working with neighbouring councils.

Action 8: JN to send out a new list of promoted routes to the SDLAF and to take the feedback given today back to WSCC.

SDLAF Advice

8. Graffham Common Fencing – Jane Willmott, SWT

JW gave a presentation on the restoration of heathland and the species that live there. She explained the consultation process that is currently underway to restore heathland at Graffham Common. She also explained the work that has been undertaken at Stedham Common.

SDLAF members asked a range of questions about accessibility, fencing, open gates, access points, reforestry and permissions. The group was asked if they were in agreement in principle with the restoration of heathland at Graffham and the group gave a resounding 'yes'.

SDLAF Advice

9. Open Access, Tim Squire, SDNP

a. The NPA role

TS explained that the NPA is both the Access Authority and the Relevant Authority and explained the implications of both. SDLAF will be a consultee on all long term directions. He explained that Natural England provide a national contact centre for access/restriction inquiries, receive applications and notifications and provide a website showing all restrictions on behalf of the SDNPA, for which we pay a fee.

b. Inaccessible sites problem

TS explained that there are 311 individual access land sites in the National Park and that 16 of these are classed as having inadequate access, and we are working at getting better access to these sites.

c. Restrictions – TS explained there are only four long term directions that will need to be reviewed, with SDLAF as consultee, but the earliest review date is 2014.

d. Improvements/way forward

The NPA are working on improvements to inaccessible sites and are also undertaking work as part of the South Downs Way Ahead project recently awarded Nature Improvement Area funding.

The group discussed issues around access land decadal review and the impact of postponements. NE are awaiting instruction from Defra. GJ suggested that as a group we could advise Defra that this delay is causing a concern to landowners.

Action 9: GJ to write to Defra with SDLAF concerns.

The group discussed the statutory duty of the SDNPA to connect island sites.

10. AOB

Requested items for next meeting:

- **Environment Survey update – ATh**
- **MoD and Walking areas – RM**
- **Cycle tracks and ORPAs on Online RoW maps – JV**
- **SDW into and out of Winchester – BD**
- **Local Sustainable Transport Fund result – BD**
- **Conflicts between users and shoots - DA**

Next Meeting: 10.30 am 17 July 2012.

Future meetings 9 October 2012 and 22 January 2013.