

SOUTH DOWNS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

ANNUAL REPORT: APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015

A FEW WORDS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

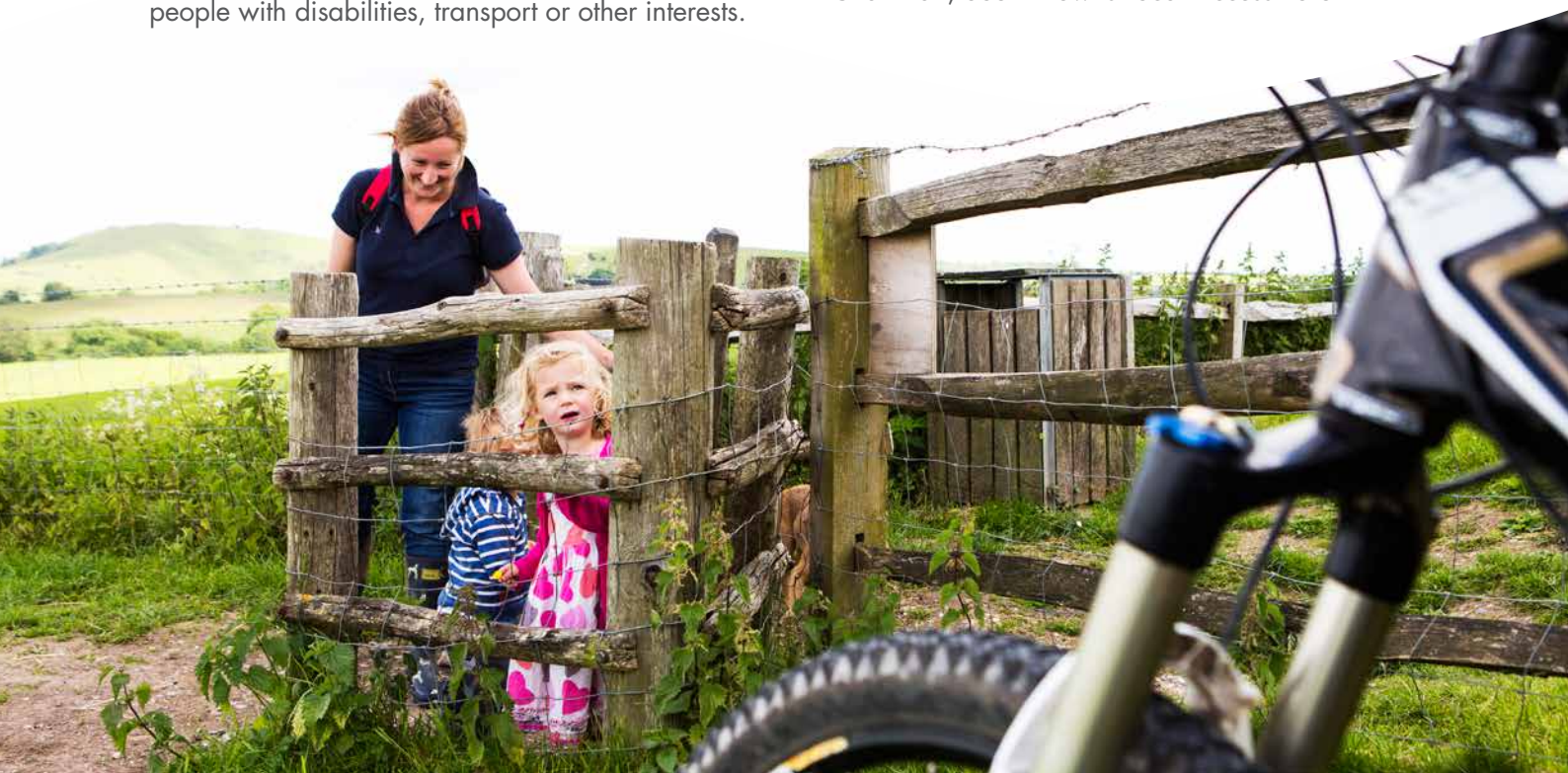
The South Downs Local Access Forum (SDLAF) is a group of 17 individuals appointed in a voluntary capacity to give advice to various government authorities and other bodies on how to provide access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment. Members of the SDLAF must consider land management requirements as well as conservation of the natural beauty of the area. A Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory body and, by law, the organisations that it advises must take note of that advice.

Members of the SDLAF are appointed by the South Downs National Park Authority and reflect the views of both land managers and recreational users of the countryside. The SDLAF may also have members who represent the interests of conservation, tourism, people with disabilities, transport or other interests.

This is my first year as Chairman, following on the chairmanship of Glynn Jones who created a great environment for information gathering and debate. The year has seen some excellent contributions from speakers, National Park Authority staff and SDLAF members. On most subjects we have come to a consensus, with only a few occasions where individual members have registered a different view. Discussion has always been constructive enabling us to offer advice that we hope has been useful and reflects the interests and expertise of a wide band of knowledge, opinion and experience. I would like to thank the National Park Authority for its continued and enthusiastic support. This has come from all levels of the organisation and has been a major factor in our growth and development into a mature advisory body.

Roger Mullenger

Chairman, South Downs Local Access Forum



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

RIVER ROTHER CANOE ACCESS

Currently canoeists have no legal or agreed access to the River Rother and seek a way forward, with advice from the SDLAF, on how this might be achieved. The SDLAF received presentations from British Canoeing explaining their needs and from the local angling club explaining how the river is used and managed. The SDLAF has offered to act as a broker to investigate an agreed solution by way of professional mediation.

NETWORK RAIL

The SDLAF was consulted on a diversion of a railway crossing in Newhaven, East Sussex. The diversion was necessary to move the definitive line of the path which follows a crossing being built to accommodate new railway sidings. The SDLAF was concerned that stiles were being used rather than more accessible gates. Although there was no evidence of any incidents at the crossing, Network Rail insisted that making the route more accessible would increase the risk of accidents.

This prompted SDLAF to write to the Office of Rail Regulation to ask whether Network Rail staff were correctly interpreting its guidance on rail crossings. The reply suggested that Network Rail staff had, in this instance, been over zealous in their approach to reducing risk and should have explored other options fully, as their guidance advises, before refusing them. The SDLAF will continue to challenge Network Rail on its use of inaccessible stiles at this location and throughout the National Park.

Network Rail also applied to extinguish a footpath crossing in Buriton, Hampshire. The SDLAF challenged Network Rail's reasons for this as it was not satisfied that the evidence given was either accurate or justification for an extinguishment. Alternatives to closure seemed not to have been investigated and any incidents that had occurred were due to trespass and irresponsible behaviour not connected with the legitimate use



The SDLAF explore access management at Beacon Hill National Nature Reserve. (© SDNPA/Tim Squire)

of the crossing. The SDLAF will have a chance to reconsider the Public Path Order when it is made.

SOUTH DOWNS WAY

The SDLAF gave its views on alternative routes of the South Downs Way including those leading into/out of Winchester, a route onto the cliffs at Birling Gap and a route diverting through Rodmell. As the independent "critical friend" of the South Downs Way the SDLAF also helped shape the new South Downs Way Management Plan which will be published online.

NATIONAL NATURE RESERVES DEDICATION

Three National Nature Reserves in the South Downs are due to be dedicated as Access Land by Natural England under their programme to dedicate freehold land. This year Natural England hosted the SDLAF on site visits to Old Winchester Hill and Beacon Hill. From these visits, SDLAF members were able to appreciate the sensitivities of these important chalk grassland sites and understand the demands of other land management interests on the reserves, such as shooting.

LOCAL PATH ISSUES

This year the SDLAF considered the following significant local rights of way issues:

- The SDLAF gave their full support to the Botley to Bishop's Waltham Bridleway Project which



will create a multi-user route along a disused railway line providing easy access from the coastal urban fringe into the National Park.

- After becoming aware of conflicts between horse riders and users of a mountain bike trail in Steyning, the SDLAF wrote to the landowners to urge a negotiated solution allowing all users to enjoy the trail without endangering each other. The SDLAF will be kept updated on progress.
- The SDLAF made recommendations to two local authorities to dedicate authority owned land, or seek dedication of privately owned land, as public bridleway on two promoted multi-user routes. The routes, Centurion Way and the Meon Valley Trail, are being improved or extended through Department for Transport funding.

STRATEGIC ADVICE

The SDLAF can be consulted by all authorities and agencies within the South Downs National Park on their strategic plans, policies and key delivery proposals.

Key consultations this year have included:

- The SDLAF attended a session giving evidence for Hampshire County Council's consultation on the review of their Countryside Access Plan.
- The SDLAF gave input to East Sussex County Council's strategic commissioning of their service to manage countryside sites and rights of way. A response was also made to their stakeholder survey.
- West Sussex County Council sought advice on its move from nine to fifteen month inspection cycles and prioritisation of rights of way work.
- The SDLAF gave input to the South Downs National Park Authority Options for the Local Plan.

- The SDLAF wrote to the Leader of East Sussex County Council expressing concern over proposals to cut rural bus services.
- The Forestry Commission consulted the SDLAF on its Forest of Bere Design Plan. The SDLAF supported the objectives and advised on having measurable outcomes.

HORSE BOX PARKING

Local British Horse Society members initiated a project to audit the provision of horse box parking in the National Park. They presented initial findings to the SDLAF which showed a range of different provision and security solutions, patchy availability of sites and lack of information. A number of recommendations from the report have been followed up by National Park Authority officers.

ACCESS LAND RESTRICTIONS

The SDLAF attended two site visits to look at Access Land restrictions to be made for public safety; one for a bull being present for part of the year and one for a dangerous chalk pit. Forum members assessed the impact of the restrictions on the ground and met the applicants who explained their land management needs. The SDLAF advice was to make the restrictions but to explore long term management options which would reduce the extent of, or remove the need for, restrictions.



SDLAF members examine a dangerous chalk pit on Access Land in East Sussex. (© SDNPA/Tim Squire)



SDLAF MEMBERS

Name	Interest	Elected member/member of other LAF
Val Bateman	Horse riding	Funtington Parish
Dave Brookshaw	South Downs Society, Volunteer Ranger	Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum
Jo Carr	Land manager	South Downs National Park Authority
Russell Cleaver	Countryside Management, Volunteer Ranger Service	
Bob Damper	Cycling	
Sue Dunkley	Disabled access	
Andy Hannaford	Education and adventure recreation	
Neville Harrison	Walker	South Downs National Park Authority
Simon James	Forestry Commission	
Richard Johnson	Public transport	
Glynn Jones	South Downs Society	West Sussex Local Access Forum
Roger Mullenger	Walk leader, nature reserve volunteer	
Isabel Swift	Land agent	
David Taylor	Land manager	
Susan Thompson	Cyclist	
John Vannuffel	Trail motorcyclist	Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum
Resignations since last Annual Report: David Ashcroft		

MEETINGS

Date	No. of Members	No. of Officers (Incl. secretary / minute taker)	No. of Observers
01.04.14	7	6	7
22.06.14	10	7	6
15.10.14	12	7	10
13.01.15	13	7	8

CONTACT DETAILS

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The SDLAF is a statutory forum administered by the South Downs National Park Authority.

BUDGET

Date	Venue	Room hire	Catering
01.04.14	Soberton Village Hall	£120	£228
22.06.14	South Downs Centre, Midhurst	0	£160
15.10.14	South Downs Centre, Midhurst	0	£178
13.01.15	The Keep, Brighton	£150	£270
Total		£270	£836

Members travel expenses total: **£335**

Printing and design for previous Annual Report: **£445**

Total running costs: **£1,886**

**SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK**