

South Downs

Local Access Forum

28 July 2015, 10.30am, at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Present:

Members: Roger Mullenger RM (Chair), Sue Dunkley SD (Vice-chair), Bob Damper BD, David Brookshaw DB, Isabel Swift IS, Neville Harrison NH, Russell Cleaver RC, Susan Thompson ST, Richard Johnson RJ, Robert Whitcombe RW

Apologies: Simon James SJ, Andy Hannaford AH, Glynn Jones GJ, John Vannuffel JV, David Taylor DT, Val Bateman VB, SDNPA - Trevor Beattie, Andrew Lee, Andy Beattie

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 - Access & Recreation Lead, Dan Ashe DA – Planning Policy Officer, Tanya Rowan TR - Performance and Research Lead

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

Observers: Val Rawlings – Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF), Bob McLellan – HCAF, Will Furze – BHCC, Graham Butler – Surrey Countryside Access Forum, Noel Humphrey – British Canoeing

A. Welcome and Minutes

1. Welcome

Roger Mullenger welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Robert Whitcombe, a new member of the SDLAF. TS explained that in the recent round of NPA appointments to external bodies Neville Harrison was re-appointed to the SDLAF but Jo Carr was not.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Factual accuracy:

The previous minutes were agreed.

Matters arising:

RM has written to the Office of Rail Regulation on behalf of the SDLAF to question the conflicting information regarding stiles at rail crossings.

BD raised the subject of the proposed closure of the rail crossing in Sheet. Two thirds of villagers voted against closing the crossing. BD commented that the only alternative routes for cyclists are much longer, on busy roads and through a very busy roundabout on the A3 access road.

ACTION 1: TS to liaise with the SDNPA Planning (Development Management) team and to update SDLAF on proposals from Network Rail about Sheet crossing.

Actions from previous minutes:

All actions from the previous meeting have been completed.

B. Key Topics for Discussion

3. Access and RoW Annual Review 2014-15

TS asked for feedback on the Access and RoW Annual Review. The SDLAF members agreed that it was comprehensive, well written and demonstrates the positive co-operation between the SDNPA and its partners.

ACTION 2: TS to promote the Annual Review and the LAF Annual Report, which have already been highlighted on the front page carousel of the website, on SDNPA online Forum. [post meeting note: posted 30 July 2015]

ACTION 3: TS to look into the current audiences and distribution of both the SDNP Annual Review and SDLAF Annual Report and will feed this back at the next meeting.

ACTION 4: LAF members to disseminate Annual Review through their affiliated organisations. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/access-and-rights-of-way-annual-review/>

4. Multi-User Routes

a) Meon Valley Trail – Russell Cleaver

RC gave a presentation on the improvement works to the Meon Valley Trail (MVT) including the reasons behind the improvements and the controversy since the work was begun. Overall it was felt that it has been a positive outcome for the majority of users with a wider range of people now being able to access the trail. HCC has received a lot of positive feedback from users, including the disabled. HCC will review the surface next spring. RC saw lots of users enjoying the trail and spoke to a number of them. He requested a survey of people's perceptions of the improvements. There may be potential to incorporate the MVT, or sections of it, into the Miles Without Stiles scheme.

ACTION 5: RM to write a letter to HCC and the SDNPA on behalf of the SDLAF thanking them for creating a multi-user route, which provides a valuable link into the SDNP and represents good value for money. To include advice to carry out post-work user survey.

b) Share the Path Awareness Campaign – Allison Thorpe

AT explained that the LSTF team would be developing a campaign to promote co-operation and understanding between users on multi-user trails. AT asked the SDLAF to put forward nominees to join a small focus group to help to develop the key messages for the Share the Path campaign. The following SDLAF members agreed to take part: BD, RC, SD and ST. TS said that VB, who had sent apologies, had expressed interest in this item.

c) LAF Research Project, experience of multi-user routes – Roger Mullenger

RM has been investigating setting up a research project into multi-user routes, for example, looking at what has been learned about the best way to surface these routes and possibilities for the future. Tanya Rowan, Performance and Research Lead at SDNPA spoke to the SDLAF about the ways in which this could be carried out.

IS commented that the views of landowners and their needs must be considered when new routes are being investigated.

The SDLAF agreed that it would like to approach university students to carry out a research project into multi-user routes, focusing on a number of promoted routes such as the Meon Valley Trail.

ACTION 6: Tanya to draft a research specification to be circulated to SDLAF members for their comments/suggestions.

d) Towpaths on the River Ouse, proposal for removal of stiles

The SDLAF agreed that the draft letter to East Sussex County Council encouraging the replacement of stiles with more accessible structures such as self-closing gates should be sent. NH requested that the west bank of the River Ouse should also be included.

ACTION 7: TS to make the necessary amendments and send the letter to ESCC. [post meeting note: letter sent 13 August 2015]

5. Rampion

a) Update on works – Dave Brookshaw

DB gave a presentation on the impact on RoW of E.ON's Rampion offshore wind-farm project. The route which the cable will take will cross 32 public RoW and will affect a 30m wide corridor of land for 14km through the SDNP. Public RoW will only need to be closed for 1-2 days twice during works, once in autumn 2015 and once in spring 2016, and diversions will be in place. DB, GJ and Tricia Butcher attended the E.ON Project Liaison Group on 12 May and will be kept informed of works when they take place. 14 days before a route will be closed notices will be put up and 5 days before work begins details of when a closure will take place will be known. Up to date information will be available on the E.ON website and a FAQ page on the SDNPA website. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/rampion-offshore-wind-farm/>

b) WSCC Mitigation Fund, SDLAF input

TS explained that a WSCC Mitigation Fund of £49,500 for RoW is available. SDLAF members are asked to submit ideas for schemes. PB explained that E.ON has obligations to fully reinstate the land they are working on, mitigation is extra, to compensate for loss or damage and access disruption. He added that there is also a mitigation fund controlled by the SDNPA of £242,500 which may be used for access but also to fund landscape, habitat and archaeology works in the SDNP areas of the cable route and Heritage Coast. IS suggested that ecological enhancement work should be prioritised because the special habitats are an important reason why people want to access the land. She said that it will be difficult and costly to reinstate some of the habitats and that an extended period of monitoring will be required.

ACTION 8: TS to circulate proposed projects to the SDLAF and request ideas for submission to the WSCC Mitigation Fund.

6. HCC Cycling Strategy – Bob Damper

BD reported that LAF comments have been fed into the Cycling Strategy. BD has composed a draft response from the SDLAF to the Hampshire Draft Cycling Strategy, being broadly supportive whilst also commenting that there is more that could be done.

The SDLAF agreed that the response from the SDLAF should be sent to HCC.

[post meeting note: letter sent day following the meeting]

The SDNPA are also submitting a broadly supportive response to the Draft Cycling Strategy.

C. Updates and Information Items

7. Local Plan Transport Policies – Dan Ashe, Planning Policy Officer SDNPA

Dan Ashe gave a presentation on the Transport and Access Policies within the Draft Local Plan. Several policies were highlighted as potentially being of interest to the LAF including those aimed at safeguarding former railway tracks for the potential development of multi-user routes; protecting the amenity of public rights of way and historic rural roads; ensuring good highway design and connectivity in new developments; and encouraging connectivity across strategic routes. The reference numbers for the transport related policies within the Local Plan are as follows:

- SD18 Transport and Accessibility
- SD19 Walking, Cycling and Equestrian Routes

- SD43 Public Realm and Highway Design
- SD44 Car and Cycle Parking Provision

The consultation period for the Local Plan is 2 September – 28 October 2015. There will be a link on the SDNPA website and Stakeholder Workshops. SDLAF member involvement would be welcomed to feed into a SDLAF response.

ACTION 9: DA, via TS, to include SDLAF members in invite to Stakeholder Workshop to be held in early September.

ACTION 10: Following attendance at Workshop SDLAF members to draft SDLAF response to Local Plan consultation to be agreed at SDLAF on 27 October 2015.

8. Other Updates

TS drew attention to the Ramblers Association's 'Big Pathwatch' which invites people to report on the condition of paths in their area. Further details can be found on the Ramblers Association website. <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/join-the-big-pathwatch.aspx>

East Sussex County Council have released the findings of their consultation on the use of RoW and countryside sites. This is available on their website.

<https://new.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisureandtourism/countryside/futurecountrysideaccess/>

Will Furze from BHCC gave an update on the parking situation at Stanmer Park. Poor parking by motorists has caused problems for the bus service taking people in and out of Stanmer Park. BHCC has been tackling this issue with a combination of double yellow lines, signage and stewards handing out leaflets. Although still not perfect, the situation is much improved since these measures were introduced.

The BHSLAF has been reinstated and will be under the remit of the City Parks Team. The date of the first meeting is 27 August 2015 to be chaired by Councillor Gill Mitchell. RM thanked BHCC for making this happen. DB thanked the SDLAF for its letter to the Chief Executive of BHCC expressing concern at the suspension of the BHSLAF.

AT reported on the opening of the Bramber Walks for All path improvement and the Downs Link A283 safe crossing extension. These works had been jointly funded by SDNPA, WSCC, DfT and other grant sources. Both were the result of partnership working over some years by the WSLAF and the Steyning and District Community Partnership, resulting in much improved access opportunities in the area.

9. Defra and Natural England business

TS and NH attended the LAF Regional Conference on 19 May and said that it had been an interesting and informative event. The England Coast Path is still on track to be completed by 2020, with work in the area of the SDNP starting in 2016.

10. Information from Members and other LAFs

a) Chairman's Report

RM attended the Hampshire Access Forum where access to MoD land was discussed as this is an ongoing issue. The Countryside Access Plan for Hampshire has been published. The Small Grant Scheme in Hampshire is still running and still has some funds available, e.g. for footpath maintenance.

RM is still wishing to progress SDLAF action to mediate a solution to canoe access on the River Rother. There is a need to involve landowners in discussions. RM and GJ to update Kevin East, British Canoeing, with a Skype meeting.

b) Public Transport Update – Richard Johnson, SDLAF member

The SDNPA 'Discover More for Less' leaflets are very good. RJ hopes that they will be distributed in urban areas as funding for bus services is so fragile, any encouragement for more people to access them is beneficial. It was disappointing that there wasn't more mention of bus services in the latest copy of South Downs View.

RJ suggested that the Share the Path campaign could promote using buses to access the paths. Also linear walks leaflets are useful for making people consider using a bus instead of a car.

c) Feedback from other LAFs

Graham Butler from the Surrey Countryside Access Forum reported that in Surrey there have been problems with managing the growing numbers of cyclists both on and off roads. A Cycling Strategy Board has been set up to manage the growth of cycling in relation to other user groups. Many unregulated cycle events have taken place, at times, conflicting with each other.

Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates:

27 October 2015
12 January 2016
26 April 2016
20 July 2016
21 October 2016