

South Downs

Local Access Forum

27 October 2015, 10.30am, at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Present:

Members: Roger Mullenger RM (Chair), Sue Dunkley SD (Vice-chair), David Brookshaw DB, Neville Harrison NH, Russell Cleaver RC, Susan Thompson ST, Richard Johnson RJ, David Taylor DT, Val Bateman VB

Apologies: Bob Damper BD, Isabel Swift IS, Robert Whitcombe RW, Simon James SJ, Andy Hannaford AH, Glynn Jones GJ, John Vannuffel JV; SDNPA - Andrew Lee, Andy Beattie; Michael Clarke - ESLAF

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, 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, Noel Humphrey – British Canoeing, Robert Cheeseman – SDS & ESLAF

A. Welcome and Minutes

1. Welcome

Roger Mullenger welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Factual accuracy:

The previous minutes were agreed with one amendment: on page 3, Public RoW will be closed for 1-2 days twice during Rampion works, once in autumn 2015 and once in spring 2016 and diversions will be in place.

Matters arising:

RM reported that he had received a response from HCC to the letter from the SDLAF regarding the Meon Valley Trail.

TS said that the Design Review Panel had considered the plans for the railway bridges at Sheet and Tide Mills and heavily criticised the proposed steel structure designs. Network Rail were advised to rethink and return with a design more sympathetic to their positioning within a National Park.

TS reported that he had received a letter from ESCC in response the SDLAF's letter encouraging the replacement of stiles on the towpaths of the River Ouse with more accessible structures. Unfortunately this is not a priority for ESCC at the moment.

ACTION 1: TS to circulate ESCC's response to the SDLAF members

TB addressed Members of ESCC, focusing on access issues. A lot of questions were asked regarding the state of access and TB clarified that responsibilities lie with the Local Highway Authority. Several Members were very interested in open access and Miles Without Stiles. TS said that there is still time to become involved in the Ramblers' Big Pathwatch. The information is on their website. There isn't currently very good coverage within the SDNP.

Actions from previous minutes:

All actions from the previous meeting have been completed.

B. Key Topics for Discussion

3. Local Plan Response

RM shared a draft copy of the South Downs Local Plan consultation form, which he had completed on behalf of the SDLAF. He invited SDLAF members to make comments / suggest amendments prior to its submission by the deadline of 28.10.15. He clarified that the Local Plan is primarily policy relating to development within the National Park so comments need to be relevant within this context, as opposed to generalised statements.

PB highlighted that access is also covered by the South Downs Partnership Management Plan.

ACTION 2: RM/ES to incorporate the amendments which were agreed in the meeting into the consultation form and submit before the deadline [Post meeting note: consultation form submitted on 28.10.15]

4. Egret's Way Improvements – Neville Harrison, SDLAF Member

NH gave a presentation on the Egret's Way. Phases 1 and 2 of the project have already been completed. Phase 3 'Active Cycling' to complete the river route is currently underway, using DfT funding.

Benefits of phase 3 will include improvements to the safety of a road crossing, bridleway access to Harping Hill and better signage. It will also open up access to Piddinghoe Farm Shop, Riverside Farm enterprise and the Centenary Park and café, benefitting local businesses.

SD suggested to TS that the Lewes to Kingston stretch could be included in Miles without Stiles.

The SDLAF agreed to support the suggested improvements associated with the Egret's Way

ACTION 3: RM to write letter from SDLAF to Ouse Valley Cycle Network supporting proposals for improvements to RoW

5. Research Project – Multi User Paths – Tanya Rowan

Tanya circulated a draft Multi-user Paths Research Student Project Spec. She plans to target specific universities and for the work to take place next year.

LAF members made suggestions for amendments which Tanya will incorporate into the document. VB wished to emphasise the importance of etiquette around sharing the use of routes and all users being respectful to each other. SD suggested that the National Trust have good multi-user paths which could be used as examples.

ACTION 4: LAF members to inform RM/TS if they are interested in participating in stakeholder/user interviews if a student undertook this element of the project

TR said that once a student has been recruited to undertake the research, she will meet again with SDLAF members and the student to clarify the project spec and ensure that SDLAF members are happy with the project focus.

HCAF supports the concept of multi-user routes to be accessible for non-motorised users. Surfaces should be fit for all users and HCAF look forward to working with SDLAF to achieve shared objectives.

6. Permissive Paths – End of Countryside Stewardship Schemes – Roger Mullenger

RM reported that under the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme the funding which used to be available for access improvement has gone. As a result, the permissive paths network may be lost. On the Isle of Wight, there is an attempt to keep the permissive routes on land owned by

public bodies and also sympathetic landowners are being approached to extend permissive access.

DT said that, as a farmer, you would probably assume that some of the paths would continue to be used even once the payment has ceased. Some appear on printed maps/leaflets.

ACTION 5: All agreed that the SDLAF should gather together the information on permissive paths inside the SDNP and divide it into areas which could be allocated to SDLAF members or members of other LAFs, to ascertain which paths are priorities to be continued.

C. Updates and Information Items

7. National Park Authority Update

a) Income Generation

TB said that cuts of 25% or 40% are expected to unprotected government departments' budgets in the next financial year. 90% of SDNPA's budget comes from grants from an unprotected budget within an unprotected department (Defra). The SDNPA's budget for 2016/17 will probably not be known until the end of January 2016.

However, members are recommending that, within the new NPA Corporate Plan, volunteering and access should be high strategic priorities; and SDNPA will continue to support the SDLAF.

The SDNPA is trying to expand its income generation in a variety of ways. The South Downs Way payback charge for large events, i.e. commercial cycle events, is one way to bring in income which can then be put back into maintenance of the route. The Planning Department is moving towards full-cost recovery. Hélène Rossiter has been seconded to work full-time on income generation. She is currently working up a business plan and identifying what additional skills need to be brought into the organisation. The National Park brand is very valuable so commercial sponsorship is another route which is being investigated.

AT gave an update on the Cycle Ambition projects which really got underway in spring 2015 and said that the Centurion Way West Dean stage is now very close to completion.

NH and TB attended the National Parks UK conference in Dartmoor and participated in the Cycle and Access workshop, which included cycle ways through railway tunnels. It was interesting to share lessons learned in this area. TB noted that the DNP has achieved really good working links with their local highway authorities.

8. Defra and Natural England Business

John Taylor, the new LAF contact from Natural England, sent his apologies.

RM attended the LAF Regional Chairs meeting organised by Natural England. They are facing budget cuts and losing the role of LAF SE Regional Coordinator.

9. HCC Walking Strategy

Hampshire County Council has prepared a draft walking strategy on the Council's aspirations to help people access walking routes and promote walking as an everyday lifestyle choice. They are seeking the views of everyone who walks in and around Hampshire. The consultation closes at midday on 7 December which is before the date of the next SDLAF meeting.

ACTION 6: All SDLAF members, if relevant, to read the draft walking strategy and make comments by 7 December.

TS said that the consultation on the proposed fencing of Iping Common closes on 30 November. The SDLAF commented on this around 2 years ago and the plans have not changed since then.

ACTION 7: TS to circulate the information on Iping Common to the SDLAF.

The Ramblers are carrying out the Don't Lose Your Way campaign, working with landowners, land managers and local authorities to find ways to make the process for recording paths more efficient and helping to claim as many historic paths as possible before the 2026 cut-off date.

ACTION 8: RM to write a letter to Chris Smith in support of the Sussex Ramblers Don't Lose Your Way project.

10. Feedback from other LAFs

Robert Cheeseman gave an update on the East Sussex LAF on behalf of Michael Clarke. Jenny Bowen, NE, gave a presentation on and the development of the Coastal Path in East Sussex. The letter regarding the towpaths on the river Ouse was copied to ESLAF.

RM gave an update from HCAF. Six small grants were allocated to a value of £11,151. There is a dynamic map on the Hampshire County Council website for reporting problems with Rights of Way. A written update was also provided.

DB reported that the BHLAF have held their first meeting since the group has re-formed. It focused on priorities for the BHLAF going forward.

Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates:

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