

South Downs

Local Access Forum

20 July 2016, 10.30am, at the South Downs Centre, Midhurst

Present:

Members: Andy Hannaford AH, Bob Damper BD, Glynn Jones GJ, Isabel Swift IS, John Vannuffel JV, Karen Roberts KR, Neville Harrison NH, Richard Johnson RJ, Roger Mullenger RM, Russell Cleaver RC, Simon James SJ, Sue Dunkley SD, Susan Thompson ST, Val Bateman VB

Apologies: David Taylor DT, Robert Whitcombe RW

SDNPA Officers In attendance: Andy Gattiker AG - SDW National Trail Lead, Nigel James NJ – Countryside & Policy Manager, Trevor Beattie TB - SDNPA CEO

Apologies: Andrew Lee AL – SDNPA Director of Strategy & Partnerships; Allison Thorpe AT – SDNPA Access & Recreation Lead

Minute Taker: Sara Osman SO, Support Services Officer, SDNPA

Observers: Val Rawlings & Bob McLellan, Regional Representatives for Hampshire & Sussex – Disabled Ramblers; Robert Self – South Downs Society

A. Welcome and Minutes

1. Welcome

RM welcomed everyone and introduced NJ, the new SDNPA lead for the SDLAF, and SO, minute taker and administrative support for the SDLAF. The Chair also welcomed Karen Roberts, a new member of the SDLAF and Member of the SDNPA.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Factual accuracy:

The previous minutes were agreed.

Matters arising:

All actions from previous meeting had been completed except the following:

- Action 2 is ongoing: *JE to report back to SDLAF on HCC course of action following consultant report on proposed ETROs. NJ to chase this up and report back at next meeting.*
- Action 5 will be covered with in Item 5 of this meeting: *SDLAF members to agree who would like to be part of a virtual working group to write a draft response which can be brought to the SDLAF meeting on 20 July.*

ACTION 1: NJ to chase James Emmett for the report to SDLAF on HCC course of action following consultant report on proposed ETROs

3. SDNPA Update – Trevor Beattie and Nigel James, SDNPA

The SDNPA staff restructure has come into effect since the last meeting and has led to greater cross-working between teams and a more robust organisation. This will enable the SDNPA to be more productive in future.

SDNPA achievements since the last meeting have included:

- the opening of the latest section of the Egrets way,
- SDNPA Members have approved funds to meet the cost of the designs and for the final extension of the Centurion Way;
- a new Heritage Coast Strategic Plan is being published shortly.

The SDNPA has also been promoting the new '8 Point Plan for National Parks' which will be the focus of the National Parks week. The Authority will be raising its concerns that the new Bus Services Bill going through parliament does not focus on rural routes.

In response to questions TB explained that all National Parks are working on a combined response to the '8 Point Plan for National Parks', which will be publicly available. Following recent changes to the UK Government, new senior Ministers at Defra have been invited to visit the SDNP.

After the UK referendum decision to leave the EU, National Parks work will continue as 'Business as Usual' until more is known. The process to leave the EU will take 2 years and the SDNPA will remain tightly focused on delivery, building upon its expertise in ecosystem services and integrated landscape scale delivery to advocate new delivery models as a contribution to future policy making. Any funded work of the SDNPA will continue as usual and no projects have been discontinued as a result of the decision to leave the EU. The SDNPA will need to look at future funding for the Big Chalk programme and TB welcomed suggestions from LAF members.

NJ introduced his new role as one of four new Countryside & Policy Managers. The new structure brings access into one team which will offer a more consistent approach. The access team will work with new Lead Rangers in each area, whilst assistant rangers will be given some access responsibilities.

Updating on the southern end of Centurion Way, NJ confirmed that Chichester District Council held a trial period for horse riders to use the trail. The trial has now finished and due to issues raised by local residents, Chichester have decided that the path will not be accessible to horses. They are due to meet with the British Horse Society to discuss the issue.

NJ responded to a question about what influence the SDNPA access team has over County Councils responsibilities to manage footpaths which are in a poor state. The SDNPA is currently reviewing how it can support all three counties within the Park and ensure consistency in footpath management across the Park. The role of the SDNPA is to hold Councils to account, but also to look at where we can provide added value, to support their work.

B. Key Topics for Discussion

4. Cheriton Wood Open Access Direction Review – Sarah Manchester

Open Access Directions are put in place for up to 5 years, and previous Directions for Cheriton Wood have been made by Natural England (NE) as the relevant authority. NE placed the first restriction in 2006 and reviewed it in 2011, just before the SDNPA came into being. The Direction wholly excludes public access to the land between 1 July and 1 February each year, to enable gamebirds to breed undisturbed, and to ensure public safety during the shooting season. When NE reviewed the Directive in 2011 their decision was for the Direction to stay the same.

This Direction expires in March 2017 and is currently open to public consultation. As the SDNPA is now the relevant authority to deal with CROW land restrictions it is being asked to review this Direction.

There are three options open to the SDNPA. They can:

1. chose to do nothing and agree to keep the Direction the same;
2. revoke the Direction completely and revert the land back to open access land;
3. chose to vary the Directions/Restrictions

If the decision is to keep the Direction the same, then a new Direction, containing the same information, needs to be created. If the SDNPA decides to revoke the Direction, this will lead to a second stage consultation, and if approved, the land will revert back to access land all the time

direction comes to end of life in March 2017. Any variations to the Direction will also lead to a second consultation and the LAF will be asked again for their opinion as consultees.

Responding to questions, the land is privately owned and the landowner has chosen to close the site for the full 210 days of the Direction notice in order to reduce confusion for local people and reduce disturbance of birds. It is listed as common land with registered rights of one farmer to collect firewood but there are no further common law rights associated with the land. An Open Access Direction cannot overrule common law rights. Cheriton Wood is part of the Cheriton battlefield, and opinion was expressed that specific archaeological access could be requested. There have been no reported complaints about the closures from local residents.

After discussions the SDLAF members agreed that, in light that the Direction appeared to be working well, restrictions were appropriate for the Land Management and there was no local opposition, they had no strong opinions against the existing arrangements in the light of no local oppositions.

ACTION 2: NJ to take the comments of the SDLAF on the Cheriton Woods Open Access Direction to the SDNPA

5. ESCC Countryside Access Strategy – Andy Le Gresley

ALG is the manager for the RoW and Countryside Team at ESCC which manages 10 sites in East Sussex including two in the SDNP, Seven Sisters Country Park and the Ouse Estuary and Riverside. Ditchling Common Country Park is also just on the border of the National Park and impacts on areas within the Park. The Seven Sisters Country Park is one of the most iconic and heavily used sites in East Sussex and the SDNP.

There is a need to review of the way the Countryside Access team worked. In light of current challenges such as reduced costs. And staffing, they are looking at how to make the best use of their resources. ALG outlined the draft strategy which is at the public consultation stage. One of the key proposals for LAF members to comment on looks at changes to the management of countryside sites: *“We should change how countryside sites are managed. The aim should be to look to pass the sites to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement”*

The consultation ends at the end of July and analysis of comments will be finished by end of September to go to Cabinet for approval in Autumn 2016. SDLAF members can submit individual comments can be submitted online or for a joint response he asked the LAF to contact him via scs@eastsussex.gov.uk

Responding to questions, ALG confirmed that ESCC would look to pass on external management of the countryside sites to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement and not to commercial operators. A fee cannot be charged for access to open access, and funds to support management of sites can be raised from other sources such as charges for car parking. TB pointed out that the Seven Sisters Country Park, which includes Beachy Head, is one of the most iconic sites within the park and is internationally recognised site. Any money generated from the site must be for the benefit of the landscape and not for commercial business profit.

A question was raised about who bears responsibility for cost of management of waterways and Andy agreed to pass on details of a Pathfinder report which looked into this as it is very complicated.

Val Rawlings, asked if there were any plans to provide a pedestrian crossing at Cuckmere Haven, as it is a dangerous place to cross, especially for people with limited mobility. SD explained that in the past a variety of different crossings were looked into, however due to the nature of the site and the risk of flooding and instability of the ground, many crossings were not suitable. ALG agreed to check any current plans with the ESCC highways teams and report back to the SDLAF.

After further discussions, RM concluded that it was very important for LAF members to comment on this strategy. Individual comments can be made via the consultation website before the deadline on 29 July, but it was agreed that a joint SDLAF response should be submitted and that members should send their comments to the SDNPA Access team who will collate them and send to ALG.

ACTION 3: ALG to pass on details of a Pathfinder report which looked into who bears responsibility for cost of management of waterways

ACTION 4: ALG to check with the ESCC highways teams and report back to the SDLAF on possible future plans for a crossing at Cuckmere Haven.

ACTION 5: ALL Please email comments to access@southdowns.gov.uk by Friday 29 July in order to coordinate comments to submit to ALG by 10 August

6. Countryside Stewardship permissive paths – Nigel James

There is no provision for access under the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme and NJ has identified 37 permissive paths in the SDNP which are protected under the previous agri-environment schemes. The agreements for these expire between August 2016 and 2020 and once the agreement expires there may be no guarantee of continued access to these paths.

It is important for the SDLAF to review and prioritise how significant each path is, and the SDNPA to work with Landowners to retain permissive access. RM mentioned that on the IOW they have had some success in retaining permissive routes by working with landowners. JV raised concerns that if permissive rights disappear it will be very hard to reinstate them.

NJ brought maps of all the identified paths to the meeting. RM proposed that LAF members visit paths in their area and report back to next LAF meeting. NJ suggested the LAF should develop criteria to assess each site to ensure consistency. The proposal was agreed and LAF members signed for maps of paths in their area.

Robert Self, from the South Downs Society, offered support from SDS officers who regularly check. RM thanked RS for his offer and their support would be welcomed

ACTION 6: NJ to send the list of 37 Permissive Paths and criteria for checking them, to Robert Self (South Downs Society) who will contact the relevant South Downs Society Officers to help check the paths.

ACTION 7: NJ to share list of permissive paths under agri-environment schemes in regional areas, keep a record of who is checking each path and develop assessment criteria for checking paths

8b: Item Bought Forward: Coast Path Update – Andy Gattiker

The England Coast Path, a new National Trail all around England's coast will be completed in 2020. A short but significant stretch within the SDNP is amongst the sections they will look at next and the SDNPA are being consulted on which path the route should take. There are various options the coastal path may follow and there is opportunity to comment up to late autumn 2017. It is important the SDLAF review where route goes before it goes to public consultation, and AG will bring maps to view and comment on at the next LAF meeting.

The Coastal Path will be a strip of Access land, not a RoW. Excepted areas include MOD land, private land and curtilage of private houses. Landowners can object to where route goes, but they can also support the route of the path, and SDLAF can work with Landowners to encourage support. Issues still under discussion include who will maintain the path, and whether there needs to be a coastal partnership group formed from interested stakeholders.

South Downs Way Update:

All National Trails have been working hard to secure funding after Natural England confirmed in June they would cut funding by 50%. After lobbying from National Trails the money has been reinstated for this year, however NE have said to expect cuts from next year.

National Trails are looking at how to deal with these future cuts and how they can work more effectively together. They will be drafting a memorandum to present robust data showing the value for money National Trails offer, which will be submitted to the Parliamentary Committee for National Trails. AG will bring the draft to the next LAF for comment as LAF input is very important.

Responding to questions, AG stated that other funding for the SDW comes from the SDNPA, as well as some from the Highway Authorities, individual grant funds, donations from the public and events. The SDNPA is looking at income generation and ways to be less reliant on funding from Government. The SDW donation project had raised approx. £300-400 per quarter and around £4,000 from events. Sales from merchandise is also growing.

ACTION 8: AG to bring maps of proposed routes for the England Coast Path in the SDNP for LAF members to view and comment on at the next meeting

ACTION 9: AG will bring the draft memorandum on National Trails to the next LAF for comment by LAF Members

c. Updates and Information Items

7. Meon Valley Trail Report – Russell Cleaver

Last year HCC and SDNPA worked to upgrade the path on the disused railway line of the Meon Valley, to make it more accessible to all users. Whilst there has been a consultation prior to the work starting, there were complaints from local residents which led to a public meeting. RC was asked to compile report at that time, giving his impressions of the path, followed by a review in spring 2016. RC showed the LAF members photo of two areas of the path, including photos just after path was laid and photos from May this year. They showed a great amount of regrowth and that the path has bedded in well and RC was satisfied with the final results, which he has made clear in his report to HCC. HCC are happy with results and cost effectiveness of path.

In response to a question about what steps were being taken to alleviate flooding at Stocks Lane, RC replied that this is an issue for HCC as a RoW issue. AG has reported this issue to Hampshire Highways, as the SDW uses this part of the trail and was so severe last winter this part of the SDW was closed. A response from the SDLAF would put pressure on Hampshire Highways to act.

ACTION 10: RM and AT to draft a letter to HCC Highways regarding the flooding at Stocks lane on the Meon Valley Trail.

8. Defra and Natural England Business

a) SDLAF Annual Report – Roger Mullenger

RM apologised that the annual report had not been written yet due to other commitments. Proposed, and members agreed, that future reports are based on a calendar year and will produce the next one in autumn, taking pressure off writing reports during the financial year end.

There is a statutory report due for Defra which RM, NJ and AT will submit.

ACTION 11: RM, AT and NJ to fill in statutory report to Defra in July and write SDLAF annual report for autumn.

b) Coast Path Update – Andy Gattiker – Updated after Item 6

9. Information from Members and Other LAFs

a) Chairs Report – Roger Mullenger

The Chairs update included:

- The Iping common grazing inquiry concluded that if fencing is not required any more it has to be taken down.
- RM to chase Tanya Rowan for her work on research on multi user routes
- RM has responded correspondence from Dr Caffyn and Kevin East of British Canoe about navigation rights and access on the river Rother
- Dave Brookshaw has resigned due to time commitments and a replacement will now be sought, preferably in Brighton/central area. RM asked SDLAF members to let him know if there is anyone that can be put forward
- RM has written draft comment on the Buriton path closure and will circulate to LAF Members for comment and will submit to HCC before deadline of 2 August

ACTION 12: RM to circulate draft comment to Buriton path closure for members to comment on.

b) Public Transport Update – Richard Johnson

There will be a formal consultation on the Governments Bus Services Bill coming up in the autumn which the SDLAF can feed into and highlight issues public transport issues in rural areas. Brighton area bus watch is extremely concerned of loss of bus services out of city into rural areas, particularly at weekends, which provide city residents with access to the countryside as well as being crucial for people living in rural areas. It was agreed to consult with Allison Thorpe when back from leave as she may have information relevant to feed into this.

WSCC recently held a consultation on the temporary bus stop suspensions on the A24, A264 and A259. Although the consultation has closed, WSCC are happy to receive comments from SDLAF. Issues discussed included: loss of use of footpaths that may occur if these bus stops close, as these bus stops enable the public to access the countryside, and that laybys could be provided to increase safety of busses stopping on the busy road.

ACTION 13: RJ to consult with **AT** on producing a SDLAF response to the Bus Services Bill

ACTION 14: RM to draft letter responding to WSCC consultation on the potential loss of bus stops to say this is not acceptable and that any safety concerns can be mitigated with a layby

c) Feedback from other LAFs

There was no further feedback.

Forthcoming SDLAF Meeting Dates: 21 October 2016

ACTION LIST – SDLAF 20 July 2016:

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