

South Downs

Local Access Forum

23rd July 2020 10.00am

Members Present:

Bob Damper BD, Doug Jones DJ, Russell Cleaver RC, Richard Waring RW, Roger Mullenger RM

Apologies:

Richard Johnson RJ, Simon James SJ

SDNPA Officers in attendance:

Allison Thorpe AT (Access & Recreation Strategy Lead), Andy Gattiker AG (National Trail & ROW Lead), Nigel James NJ (Countryside & Policy Manager), Tania Hunt (Support Services Officer - Minutes)

Apologies: Trevor Beattie TB (Chief Executive SDNPA)

1. Welcome & Apologies

AG welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were given, as listed above.

AG also announced that Annie Brown has resigned due to being appointed as Member of SDNPA. AG wished her well and said that she would still be a very valuable contributor to the National Park Family.

BD and AG welcomed Richard Waring to his first meeting of the SDLAF and noted appreciation for his contribution.

2. Items for AOB

RC did not receive an agenda and AG agreed to look into why.

ACTION 1: AG and TH to check contact details for RC

NJ thought it would be good if BD wrote a letter to Annie Brown, thanking her for her contribution to the SDLAF over the last couple of years.

ACTION 2: BD agreed to write a letter to Annie Brown thanking her for her contribution to the SDLAF. DJ asked if the SDLAF were looking to replace Annie Brown, ideally with someone from the farming community?

AG The SDLAF will be looking to recruit and are looking for a balance of interests on the SDLAF and therefore someone from the farming community would be preferable.

NJ suggested that he could liaise with Bruce Fowkes (Farming Officer SDNPA) and send communication out to the Farm Cluster groups to see if there is anyone who is interested, as it is essential to get someone from a farming background. All SDLAF in attendance unanimously agreed this would be a positive move forward.

ACTION 3: NJ to speak with Bruce Fowkes and send out communication to Farm Cluster Groups to recruit for vacancy within the SDLAF.

BD would like to add SCATE to AOB

3. Chair's Update

BD had very little to update due to lockdown. However, he wanted to report that he had been out on his bike and that the tracks were all in good condition – mainly due to the dry weather.

BD had a telephone interview with Kate from Heritage Insider, the organisation commissioned by the NPA to review the PMP process, to assess how the process of producing the plan had gone. The interview was positive and Kate was happy with what was said.

BD also updated on the MOD Liaison Committee in Hampshire. The last meeting was cancelled but there will be a zoom meeting next Thursday 30th July, with BD and RM in attendance.

4. Covid19 and Countryside Access

AG gave a presentation regarding updates and issues affecting access during Covid19

- i) Level of use – during lockdown, near towns and villages the ROW networks were busy with local people taking an opportunity to do daily exercise. The more remote places were really quiet.

- ii) Level of use when lockdown eased - use increased significantly, this information was gained through people counters and locals and staff out on the downs. This has created a 200% increase in some areas on ROW, parks and access areas.

This had created some issues;

- a) Inappropriate signage; some local residents did not want the public using local ROW, which lead to some signage being used to deter the public in a handful of cases.
- b) Parking issues and litter has become an issue. Parking issues due to an increase in the public use and limited use of public transport due to government advice. This has created parking issues on verges and blocking roads and car parks up to absolute capacity.
- c) Fly tipping has increased due to local recycle centres being closed.
- d) Wild camping has increased significantly and is wide spread – a number of multiple large family tents with large gatherings, fires and loud music.

- iii) Ranger teams have been busy;

- a) Initially after going back out; survey of areas to see how things were after not getting out for a couple of weeks.
- b) Making a note of any urgent work that need to be done - especially vegetation clearance. Clearance has been carried out by Rangers on the routes that the SDNPA manage.
- c) Patrolling – being a presence has been a key thing over the last few weeks, so that people can see that we are out and about and we can share message about appropriate use and taking litter home.
- d) Litter picking
- e) A Ranger WhatsApp group was set up so that Rangers out patrolling can message and give instant updates to other Rangers and the Comms team, so there is a live update of where issues are, where there are parking issues and other problems – the Comms team can help with this.

- iv) Funding; NPA approved the release of additional funding of £375,000 to help recovery in the national park. The money has been split across all the areas of work and the Access theme board has a pot of £70,000. This will be used to address Access issues that have come about due to Covid19. This could be projects to support land management – due to increase public use, to improve public access, or anything that has become an issue, to do with Access, due to Covid19. Expressions of interest can be submitted to the Access Theme Board.

There was a general discussion about the positives and negatives of lockdown and BD mentioned that he had also seen a large increase in cycling and family groups and clearer air quality on the downs. AG wanted to note that there a high number of new users in the park that have moved out into the downs due to parks and pub gardens being closed. However, noted that some changes made to communicate with these different audiences. RC noted positives in lack of traffic and roads not being a barrier, and a huge increase of people using footpaths in April/ May. The downside is the increase in BBQ's on chalk grassland. AG - BBQ's are something that Rangers have been noticing more of and some of them have created significant damage. The SDNPA are trying to get the message out there not to have fires.

DJ mentioned that HCC were not cutting and maintaining paths this financial year. They were letting out the contract when Covid19 came along. He thought HCC were hoping that local communities will cut back paths in their own parishes and wondered if this was happening elsewhere in the park? AG – unfortunately yes, councils seem to be clearing some highway verges but not ROW clearance. Our Rangers have increased the amount of cutting done but are concentrating promoted routes, rather than the wider network. Therefore, there may be some issues with overgrowth. In Hampshire additional cutting has been seen, which is assumed to be local communities. RM thought that this would be a good opportunity to increase diversity of access in the SDNP in line with the PMP. He offered that this would be a good time, while people are around to have walk leaders take groups of people out who would not usually be out in the SDNP.

5. Update on planning and major infrastructure projects (Inc. Brighton Gas works)

AT updated the group on planning and major infrastructure projects;

- a) Rampion 2 – off shore windfarm will be visible from greater distances than the first phase. Open trenches were dug across the downs and funding was given to offset the damage caused by the project in Rampion 1. The extension and expansion for Rampion 2 is very large and the proposed new windmills that will be used are much bigger than the previous ones. The proposal is to come ashore somewhere between Littlehampton and Bognor Regis and cabling will once again be routed through

the National Park. The developer has submitted a Scoping Opinion to the Planning Inspectorate. This covers topics that the developers will scope in, or out of, their Environmental Impact Assessment. SDNPA Officers are preparing a response for 4th August. AT will be looking at Access and how ROW are affected, particularly the SDW and other promoted routes. Wider consultation, including opportunities for the SDLAF to make a submission will be come later in the process.

- b) Brighton Gasworks: A neighbouring authority consultation of a redevelopment of a gasworks in Brighton. The proposed residential development overlooks the SDNP with tower blocks of 8-9 stories – having a visual impact on the SDNP. This is not yet a planning application though SDNPA have been able to submit views to the developer. While there will be considerable visual impact looking out to the sea from the SDNP, there will also be opportunities to facilitate better access to the National Park and improve roads and improve for walkers and cyclists. Nat Belderson in Planning is the lead contact. AT has shared SDNPA response with BD.

6. Update on Centurion Way

AT updated the group on the Centurion Way: Some SDLAF Members will recall a site visit in 2015 before work was carried out to extend this railway cycle path to West Dean. The SDNPA now has planning permission to extend the path to the SDW in Cocking. Funds for construction still need to be raised but SDNPA Members have approved funding for some further ecological surveys for the tunnels which are protected for bats. Officers are currently working on EAFRD bid to improve 2 restricted byways to the north of the SDW connecting with Cocking and to create new bridleway that will connect Hoefield Lane and the SDW. As part of the bid an economic study is being carried out to make the case for this project on the basis that it will attract visitors who are walkers and cyclists, which will in turn boost the economy. The bid is will be submitted on the 31st August. A telephone survey of local businesses has been conducted and an online user survey generated 1300 responses. LAF members agreed to write a letter in support of the bid. **ACTION 4:** AT to send more information and suggested wording to BD

7. Update on Permissive Paths project

NJ presented an update to the SDLAF;

The SDLAF had previously identified and prioritised permissive access that was in, or expired, under the old agri-environment HLS. The purpose of doing this was to avoid loss of valuable access routes when these agreements expire. The concern within the SDNPA, as well as across the whole of the country, is that farmers may not wish to continue permissive access due to no longer getting paid for it. Permissive access within 19 HLS agreements were identified by the SDLAF as a priority for seeking to remain until 2024, when the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme comes into place. Whilst it is not certain, under the assumption that public access is a public benefit, then farmers should get funding for providing access under the new ELM scheme. Currently, access within 12 of the identified 19 HLS agreements, involving 14 landowners, is being secured for continuing. There was a discussion about the importance of publicising the paths. NJ stated that the SDNPA will be making clear in the agreements that paths will be publicised on the SDNPA website, ViewRanger and via signage on the ground.

8. Update on Open Access restriction

AG gave an update on Open Access restrictions:

1. Breaky Bottom, East Sussex;

The SDNPA were due to advertise the intention to maintain the reduced restriction. However, the SDNPA have been unable to complete this advertising due to purdah in the November elections and then Covid 19 outbreak. The intention is to advertise on site and Open Access contact centre in the next month, or so. Then there will be a consultation. If the consultation brings up issues, then it will be brought back to the LAF and there will be a second consultation. AG will update the LAF when the consultation starts.

2. Coffin Row, Meon Valley, Hampshire:

This was a restriction to restrict people with dogs on a public access site, but the site has no legal way of getting to it. It was felt a waste of officer's time to go through the process of consultation every few years to put a restriction on an inaccessible site. After consultation with Natural England it was decided to let it lapse and do nothing. In November of this year that restriction will end and as the SDNPA is just letting the restriction lapse, there is no need for any formal consultation. AG has not heard anything from the landowners, or their agents to say that they are not happy with that decision.

9. A.O.B

BD wanted to discuss whether SCATE – South Coast Alliance on Transport and Environment should be invited to present to the LAF AT reported that members of SCATE and South Downs Society had met SDNPA officers including Trevor Beattie last summer. They liked the SDNPA’s cycling and walking strategy and Vision Map but felt the SDNPA were not addressing on-road issues. It was explained that the SDNPA was not a highways authority and would therefore be unlikely to lead on this issue but would be supportive of an overview if they wanted to collect such information. It was agreed that SCATE would gather information on Missing Links via their network of contacts and the SDNPA would try to map proposals on GIS. AT suggested an invite to a future LAF meeting would be appropriate when this work had progressed further.

DJ reported that HCC had recently consulted off the back of Covid19 about reducing car parking and widening pavements to create more space for pedestrians and cyclists. This is an ongoing opportunity to feed in problems including on minor roads.

RM asked how strongly the SDNPA pushed for extra paths to be created via application for new housing developments? AT reported that case officers usually consulted the team on housing developments and individual applications and a robust system was in place. The Access team has also created permissive path agreement templates to help planning officers negotiate the right type of agreement ensuring the the right organisation takes on the maintenance if the path is not dedicated as a ROW. DJ commented that with the adopted Local Plan in place, it was clear where developments would be happening and sites could be looked at in advance to identify potential paths and ROW improvement. AG agreed. DJ suggested it might be worth writing to the local parishes to get their thoughts on the allocated sites.

Dates for next LAF meeting

Wednesday 21st October – Will look at latest advice at the time. Hopefully face to face, if not virtually.

ACTION LIST – SDLAF 23rd July 2020

Action	Who	Update/ Closed
ACTION 1: To check contact details for RC	TH	Closed
ACTION 2: BD agreed to write a letter to Annie Brown thanking her for her contribution to the SDLAF.	BD	
ACTION 3: NJ to speak with Bruce Fowkes and send out communication to Farm Clusters Groups to recruit for vacancy within the SDLAF.	NJ	
ACTION 4: AT to send more information and suggested wording for Centurion Way letter of support to BD	AT	