

South Downs

Local Access Forum

23rd August 2021 10.00am

Held: Dual meeting at SDC, Midhurst and via Zoom

Members Present:

Bob Damper BD, Richard Johnson RJ, Doug Jones DJ, Simon James SJ,

Via Zoom: Roger Mullenger RM, Richard Waring RW, Andy Hannaford AH

Apologies:

Russell Cleaver, Sue Dunkley

SDNPA Officers In attendance:

Allison Thorpe AT (Access & Recreation Strategy Lead), Andy Gattiker AG (National Trail & ROW Lead), Tania Hunt TH (Support Services Officer - Minutes), Andrew Lee AL (Director, Countryside & Policy Management);

Presenter: Sarah Manchester (SDNPA Consultant)

Apologies: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive), Nigel James NJ (Countryside & Policy Manager)

1. Welcome & Apologies

BD welcomed everyone to the meeting and TH, as listed above gave apologies.

2. Items for AOB

The following items were put forward for discussion under AOB:

RJ: National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plan

AL: SSCP, Glover Review, South Downs Partnership

BD: M3 Junction 9

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

BD Introduced AG to discuss item 3. AG welcomed everyone to the meeting and mentioned that it was the first meeting in person of the SDLAF for nearly 2 years. The SDLAF has managed to meet online during this time via Zoom and are experimenting with a hybrid meeting today. AG asked for feedback at the end of the session to how members felt about this new method moving forward. AG put forward that this meeting would act as an AGM as this had not happened for some time and was overdue. As part of an AGM meeting, the Chair and Vice Chair need to be elected. The current membership of the SDLAF will also be reviewed. AG asked for nominees for Chair. BD suggested that he could continue, which was seconded by DJ. AG asked all members to vote and this was unanimously agreed. For Vice Chair, RJ was put forward by BD and was seconded by DJ. AG then asked all members to vote and RJ's appointment was also unanimously agreed.

4. SDLAF Membership

AG then went on to discuss membership of the SDLAF. He stated the last 18 months had been challenging and that it was difficult to assess attendance. A letter regarding membership had been sent out to all members to see if they were happy to continue and AG thanked all those who had responded. AG thought this a good opportunity to refresh the membership and make sure that it is fit for purpose. As a result of the communication there were 3 members who wished to stand down; Edward Seymour (Land Agent – Strutt & Parker), Nick Taylor (Farming and Landowner Representative) and Val Bateman (Equestrian Representative). BD suggested that a letter be sent to all these members thanking them for their service.

ACTION: AG/ BD to formulate letter to send out to members who are standing down.

AG mentioned he would send out another communication to those who had not responded to confirm their intentions.

ACTION: AG to send out communication regarding membership to those who had not communicated back to the original message regarding membership.

There are 7 vacancies to fill on the SDLAF due to Annie Brown also standing down when she was appointed to the SDNPA. The vacancies are; Landowners and Land Managers, Farming, Equestrian and Access and Disability.

AG asked for members to let him know any recommendations they might have for membership.

RW suggested that the LAF should look to increase the diversity of the membership and that it would be worthwhile to target groups and organisations. BD suggested a public advert for the vacancies.

ACTION: ALL to let access@southdowns.gov.uk know if they know any potential new members.

ACTION: AG to target advertising for membership of the SDLAF and to put out a public advert.

5. Cheriton Wood Open Access Restriction

SM updated the SDLAF regarding the open access at Cheriton Wood and then offered to take questions after.

The Cheriton Wood access restriction comes under regular review every five years. The SDNPA as relevant authority is required to conduct the review and the statutory process has begun. The SDLAF members have already been invited to comment on the review of the existing direction. Two comments were received from SDLAF members, which will be incorporated into the report that will go to the SDNPA. The review of the direction is in two stages. The first stage invites people to comment on the existing direction. The second stage invites people to comment on proposals for the new direction, or in the absence of a new direction it can pose to revoke the existing direction.

Cheriton Wood is described as a shooting wood. It is different from most woods where the shoot normally takes place outside of the wood. It is classed as access land by virtue of it being a registered common for historic reasons. The existing direction restricts access from July through to the beginning of February. The landowner is keen to renew the restriction. The SDNPA last reviewed the direction in 2016/17. This was the Authority's first review, previous directions having been made by Natural England, who were the relevant authority prior to the establishment of the National Park. There was little time during the last review to research the impacts of lack of public access on the woodland and the decision was taken to renew the direction unchanged and to actively explore less restrictive options for the future. The SDNPA in discussion with the landowner, has looked at a range of options which might be taken forward in a new direction in order to provide greater access for the public. It is now proposed to reduce the length of the closure and in addition to take Tennant Woods which is not actively managed for the shoot, out of the direction, leaving public access all year around. The SDNPA is also looking at the possibility of creating a waymarked loop around, which would encourage people to walk in this area.

AG shared the map of Cheriton Woods on Zoom so that everyone could see it.

BD commented that Tennant Wood borders the public road and is therefore the most valuable part of the woods in terms of ease public access.

AT thanked Sarah and wanted to add that very few responses had been received at the first stage: two from SDLAF members SJ and RC, and one from a member of the public responding with the view that the SDNPA should not allowing shooting in the National Park.

RM added that he leads U3A groups in that area agreed that it would be good to have extra areas to use. However, he was concerned about the shoot and mentioned that it would need to have good signage to stop people wandering into an area being used for shooting.

SM replied that restriction is quite lengthy from August through to February, but the shooting period is only the November, December, January, and the landowner has a shoot only once every one or two weeks. The responsibility for safety lies with the person whose hands the gun lies and they do have to have remain alert. The landowner also has 28 days a year as part of the CROW Act, where they can close public access and this may be used around the shoot times. Public safety is a concern but hopefully this can be controlled by other mechanisms.

BD asked what the task is for SDLAF .

SM responded, once the SDNPA has confirmed its proposals for the next long term direction, a public consultation will commence and the SDLAF will be invited to respond. with its views being taken into account when the SDNPA makes its final decision.

6. Breaky Bottom, Open Access Site Restriction

AG updated on Breaky Bottom's restriction. AG reported that this is another long term direction and is a matter of public safety, due to a disused farm quarry being on the site. The first direction closed the entire site to the public. The last review that was conducted reduced the direction to only cover the quarry and some of the immediate surroundings, therefore opening up about a third of the site that was previously restricted. The restriction was due to be reviewed, which the SDLAF started by looking at all the details back in 2019. The process was started but slowed by the lockdowns. However, the SDNPA communicated with the landowner, to seek the landowners views on continuing the direction. There was no response, or acknowledgement. The process halted due to the pandemic and therefore, technically the actual direction has ceased to exist and the whole site is now open to the public. This means that the process will need to start from scratch again. Although none of the issues on the ground are any different.

The key thing is to get some communication with a landowner to ascertain what their intentions are, what they want and their views on the site. Previously, the landowners views were very much that they wanted the site closed for their own personal privacy. This will need to come back to the SDLAF at a later stage once the landowner has been communicated with.

AG asked SM if she was able to clarify if the landowner does not respond, who is liable for that public safety.

SM put forward that it is the landowner is liable for public safety. The landowner would also need to be the one to apply for the process to start a new direction. However, if the SDNPA think that there is a public safety issue they can then start the process themselves.

RM questioned that in previous visits to Breaky Bottom there were talks of encouraging the landowner to put a fence across the top of the quarry?

AG answered that this was correct and that the SDNPA offered to pay for the fence, which would enable more of the site to become open to the public. However, the landowner declined this offer.

BD put forward that perhaps the best way forward is to renew that offer, which shows that the authority is concerned about safety, and to some extent protects the authority.

AG suggested that this could be discussed with the access team.

ACTION: AG to discuss renewal of offer to put up a fence at Breaky Bottom with the access team.

7. Rampion 2 Public consultation

AT wanted to bring attention to the SDLAF that Rampion 2 is out for public consultation at the moment. The SDNPA is looking at the all the documents in great detail and are putting together a very detailed report. This will go to the authority members to sign off and will be the official authority response. AT circulated via email, opportunities to take part in webinars and consultations earlier in the year, which some members of the SDLAF attended

AT shared a PowerPoint presentation with the group.

Main points

- The wind turbines are in a similar area to the existing wind turbines, but the existing field of turbines will be expanded. The new turbines are likely to be much taller than the existing ones.
- The cable for transmission comes on shore at Climping, heads up the Arun Valley through the SDNP at Cross Bush, then goes through the Downs at Warningcamp and Wepham Down, meets the SDW in Washington, then crosses the A283 between Storrington and Steyning area. Affecting quite a bit of a national park, the ROW network and some open access land.
- Alternative routes for ROW have been proposed, although there are some issues with these. For example, putting bridleway users onto the A283 for some distance. The Rampion team have been alerted to this and that this is unacceptable.
- In the appendices of the report is a list of all of the ROW, and the Rampion consultants assessment of the impact of the cabling on those ROW.
- The SDNPA have commissioned aerial photography to see the impact of the cabling from the first round of Rampion. From the photography the 30m wide trench dug for the cabling is still clearly visible on the ground 3 years on. There are therefore lessons to be learnt about the restoration of the chalk grassland and also about the noticeable impact of the cabling on the arable land.

The consultation is running until the 16th September. Now the SDLAF need to decide how to respond to the consultation.

AL put forward that this proposal is a massive project and these wind turbines are as big as the Spinnaker Tower. The real issue is the choice of cable routes and it would be useful to have a robust response from the SDLAF, as RWE have said that the route through the SDNP is the only viable route. RWE have put forward the option to connect at Lovedean in Hampshire, which would have less of an impact on the SDNP, but longer marine cabling would have technical issues and have an impact on the SAC's, especially Chichester Harbour. The SDNPA are pushing hard for them to report why they have chosen this route on environmental and technical grounds. The SDNPA have demonstrated in law that cost is not a reason to have major infrastructure going through the park, with the Arundel Bypass.

BD suggested that, perhaps himself, RW, RM, GJ and DJ should come together by email, and try to draft something out, and then bounce it off the rest of the SDLAF.

ACTION: BD, RW, RM, GJ DJ, to come together via email to come up with a response for the consultation on Rampion 2.

8. AOB

RJ - National Bus Strategy:

RJ updated that the government issued the National Bus Strategy a few months ago, which was mentioned in the last SDLAF meeting. Most local authorities have now submitted to the government stating that they will be implementing enhanced partnerships with the bus operators. This is a requirement in order to attract a share of the 3 billion pounds of funding that the government is proposing to make available through the National Bus Strategy to improve bus services in England.

However, a 3rd of this funding is for electric buses, with the rest to be shared amongst 79 authorities. There is encouragement for authorities to look at improving services to rural areas and for leisure purposes, not just in the urban environment. RJ mentioned that he had looked at the websites for all local transport services around the National Park, which are essentially the counties and Brighton & Hove City Council. All of them are engaging with key stakeholders on their bus service improvement plans, which they are required to produce by October and submit to the government. Of those authorities, West Sussex, East Sussex and Surrey have online consultations, which are closing in the first half of September. BHCC are engaging with key stakeholders directly, due to timescales. The engagement exercise is to gain input from local residents and key organisations, stakeholders and businesses, to see what they think should be in the plan that each local authority is tasked to produce.

RJ suggested the SDLAF could respond in some way mentioning the importance of links to, from and around the National Park and the need for improvement, with particular emphasis on providing weekend services, key interchange points like the bus, or railway stations and where bus routes meet the South Downs Way National Trail. There are currently several points on the National Trail where it's very difficult to get access by public transport at weekends.

Marketing and promotion to residents and visitors also needs to be looked at, particularly on the ground. All the consultations are in the form of surveys, it was suggested that the SDLAF respond to each authority via a letter within the next three weeks.

It was agreed that RJ would draft out a response from the SDLAF due to his experience and association with organisations related to public transport.

ACTION: RJ to prepare draft letter for sharing with LAF members. SDNPA to send agreed final letter on behalf of the SDLAF to each of the local authorities.

AL - Seven Sisters Country Park, Glover Review, South Downs Partnership:

AL wanted to update on 3 things

- SDNPA have taken over the freehold for SSCP from East Sussex. There are very ambitious long term plans with a 2 million pound refurbishment plan of Exceat Visitor Centre, Foxholes Cottages holiday accommodation all planned in phase one. This is happening now. There are temporary reception facilities down on the coastal side of the A259 with plenty of people using the site and lots of interest in future plans. The Landscape Management Plan, which is broadly called Rest, Reset, Restore, is about biodiversity, cultural heritage and all the access opportunities.
- The Glover Review. There's been an extraordinary amount of correspondence between DEFRA's departments nationally with protective landscapes, YHA, NGOs and all sorts of other people around the Glover Review. There will be a public consultation in September, based around some

of the Glover proposals where the government wants to get a view, particularly with regards to legislation and strengthening purpose 2 to make it much more about access. A good opportunity for the SDLAF to take part..

- South Downs Partnership, AL mentioned the new Partnership and that several members would be very supportive of the SDLAF and its work around Access and Engagement work. AL went on to mention in particular Chris Todd (Transport Action Network) who takes on a Champion role for Access; the YHA representative with a very strong access and inclusion agenda; Butterfly Conservation and volunteering representative; an education champion for communities inside the park; a GP who is very involved in social prescribing and is extremely interested in how people benefit from accessing the park and a Brighton resident, whose interests are the communities outside the park. These six people could be very useful connections for the SDLAF.

BD – M3 Junction 9:

BD wanted to discuss proposals for M3 junction 9 on the edge of Winchester. BD took part in an online consultation, consultant engineers do not seem to be listening and seemed to have changed. All the representations that the SDLAF made previously seem to have been forgotten. The new consultants have re-costed the work and as it is more costly than previously thought some access and rights of way provision have been reduced or removed from the scheme.

AT added that she had found out about a series of stakeholder meetings regarding access via Cycle Winchester. Neither the National Park nor Hampshire ROW officers had been invited to these meetings. Following the meetings with Highways England and the designs the Long Walk to Easton Lane path proposal and now been put back to a bridleway proposal, with a much greater understanding of what is an appropriate specification for that location. The specification had been over engineered, and at the meeting group were able to reach a specification that would suit users, that would be appropriate for that location. AT mentioned there was still quite a lot of work to do on the other access links and that HE and consultants wanted to get the local authorities on board for these discussions. AT mentioned that it was a very frustrating process as these routes should be seen as essential, and not as extras to be bid for. AT also added that it was also very frustrating to see cycling ruled out on a cost basis when the lines of the path are actually on the redundant carriageway of the A33. AT agreed with BD that it is like starting again with all the work was done beforehand. Members have already signed off on their response on behalf of the SDNPA, which was quite robust.

ACTION: AT to share the SDNPA response to the M3 Junction 9 with the SDLAF

ACTION: BD/ AT to explore how the SDLAF could have an input in a response regarding M3 Junction 9.

9. Dates for LAF meeting

The next meeting will be December 2021 and it was agreed that a hybrid meeting would be used again.

ACTION LIST – SDLAF 23rd October 2019

Action	Who	Update/ Closed
ACTION 1: to formulate letter to send out to members who are standing down.	AG/ BD	
ACTION 2: to send out communication regarding membership to those who had not communicated back to the original message regarding membership.	AG	
ACTION 3: to let access@southdowns.gov.uk know if they know any potential new members.	ALL	
ACTION 4 to target advertising for membership of the SDLAF and to put out a public advert.	AG	
ACTION 5 to discuss renewal of offer to put up a fence at Breaky Bottom with the access team.	AG	
ACTION 6 to come together via email to come up with a response for the consultation on Rampion 2.	BD, RW, RM, GJ DJ	
ACTION 7 RJ to send adrafted agreed letter to each of the local authorities regarding the National Bus Strategy.	RJ	
ACTION 8 to share the SDNPA response to the M3 Junction 9 with the SDLAF	AT	
ACTION 9: to explore how the SDLAF could have an input in a response regarding M3 Junction 9.	BD/ AT	