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West Sussex Local Access Forum



2nd August 2017

Sent by email to: planningpolicy@chichester.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

WSLAF response to Chichester Local Plan Review 2034

I am responding to the above consultation on behalf of the West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF).

West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) is an independent advisory body, established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to give access advice to local authorities, statutory organisations and non-government organisations. In giving that advice, the Forum's main objective is to ensure the existing network of public rights of way (prows), as well as the wider access network, is protected and where possible enhanced. The Forum has a balanced membership of knowledgeable and experienced users (walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers), landowners and other interests (including conservation, disabled access, landscape). For further information about the Forum please visit www.wslaf.org.

The Local Plan Review Issues and Options consultation was discussed at a recent meeting of the Forum, and whilst WSLAF Members understand the Review is required to make sure sufficient housing is planned for the future, concerns were raised that not enough emphasis is placed on the need to ensure that strategic developments are planned so as to improve and enhance the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and access networks. This will benefit of users, both existing and new, especially on the Coastal Plain, bearing in mind that PRoW are the principal means to access the countryside.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 75, states "Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks".

The West Sussex Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) included in the evidence base for Policy 52 Green Infrastructure, states that on the Coastal Plain "paths are mainly footpaths, so there are very limited opportunities for users other than walkers", and goes on to say "off-road cycling or horse riding opportunities are very limited." The RoWIP is at present being reviewed, but in the last 10 years the situation outlined has hardly changed, and in reality has deteriorated for all vulnerable road users due to increasing traffic volumes, a situation likely to get worse.

Whilst the Adopted Local Plan has much to like as regards access, green infrastructure and improvements to facilities for walkers and cyclists, Members would like to see equestrian needs recognised as well, with a commitment to providing multi-use routes (both linear and circular), where possible, and where there is a demonstrable need on safety grounds. Multi-use routes are being provided in developments elsewhere in the county, and we would urge CDC to prioritise this aim during master planning.

WSLAF understands that walking and cycling have an important role to play as transport utility modes, and new development should have permeability to allow this, but Members feel not enough emphasis is given to the role they play in leisure and recreation, which are of equal importance in existing and future residents' lives. Walking and cycling for leisure is the "gateway" to utility use (which reduces car use). The importance of the PRow network and access routes to local communities, providing safe amenity and leisure routes and contributing to health, tourism and sustainability, needs more recognition. As part of Green Infrastructure, PRowS also provide 'green corridors' which are of benefit to the natural environment and wildlife.

In Green Infrastructure, para 19.67, Members were pleased to see that cycle and pedestrian links are included as strategic green infrastructure assets, but request that PRow are also included in the list. In para 19.71, Members were similarly pleased to note the inclusion in the list of "New or enhanced corridors and assets should be multi-functional, but would like to see added "and as multi-user as appropriate."

In Appendix A. Green Infrastructure, para A31, Members agree "it is important every opportunity to create a new public right of way is explored", and in para A34, similarly that "New infrastructure must join to and enhance existing infrastructure provision", but would emphasise that this must be done at an early stage, during master planning.

Whilst the Appendix heading for this section is "Cycling, Walking, Bridleways and the Strategic Sites", some Members have questioned why "Bridleways" and not "Horse Riders" are mentioned. The heading of Para A37 "Cycling and pedestrian infrastructure should be designed to:" has also caused Members concern, as it is felt this should be changed to reflect all non-motorised users (NMUs) entitled to use bridleways.

In Table A1 Definition of Terms – the definition of 'bridleway' does not include all legal users, and should be changed to "A Public Right of Way for walkers, horse riders and cyclists".

This letter constitutes formal advice from the West Sussex Local Access Forum. Chichester District Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this Local Access Forum in carrying out its functions.

Thank you for considering WSLAF's comments. Members look forward to being updated on progress on this matter, and would welcome being consulted in the future on any similar matters that may impact on access.

Yours sincerely



Jane Noble, Forum Officer
West Sussex Local Access Forum

Copy for information to: All WSLAF members
Jon Perks, Principal Rights of Way Officer, West Sussex CC