



Meeting of the West Sussex Local Access Forum Wednesday 28 April 2021

A meeting of the West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) was held, via Teams, at 10.30am, Wednesday 28/4/2021.

MINUTES

Present

Graham Elvey (GE) – Chairman	Christine Johnson (CJ)
Tricia Butcher (TB) – Vice-Chairman	Christine Supiot (CS)
Monica Collingham (MC)	Phil Miles (PM)
Geoff Farrell (GF)	Carol Montgomery (CM)
David Green (DG)	Tim Thomas (TT)
Ian Hunt (IH)	Clare Weston (CW)

Officers

Jane Noble (JN)	Forum Officer, WSCC
Neil Vigar (NV))	Countryside Services Manager, WSCC
Nick Scott (NS)	Principal Rights of Way Officer, WSCC (part meeting only)
Donna Trethewey (DT)	Planning and Communities Officer, WSCC
Clare O'Reilly (CO)	Access Ranger, Area 6, WSCC (part meeting only)

Observers - None

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Helen Baldwin (HB), Nicol Beard (NB), Duncan Crow (DC), Jason Lavender (JL) and Derek Whittington (DW).

2. Introduction to new members of West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Rights of Way Team

JN had circulated WSCC Countryside Management staff structure chart to members prior to the meeting.

- a) Nick Scott, Principal Rights of Way Officer, has been in post since June 2020. Previously he was an Access Ranger, until leaving in 2017, so is familiar with WSCC's PRow work.
- b) Donna Trethewey, Planning and Communities Officer has just started with WSCC. She will be the main point of contact for Public Rights of Way (PRow) strategic development work and also for community groups who wish to improve the network.
- c) Johnathan Kaye, Rights of Way Officer started in January and mainly processes reports from the public and deals with general enquiries.
- d) Clare O'Reilly, Access Ranger Area 6 (covering Crawley to Shoreham-by-sea) started March 2021. She manages inspections with help from volunteers and

works via WSCC's routine maintenance contractor. She also investigates reports in Area 6 and works with landowners, parish councils and others to resolve issues. She is an ex-mountain ranger specialising in path maintenance.

CO left the meeting

3. Minutes of the Forum

a) Minutes of formal meeting of 16 December 2020

- i. The minutes of the formal meeting on 16 December 2020 were approved as correct.
- ii. Actions and matters arising not covered by agenda - all items are on the agenda other than:

Item 2b Bridleways on the Coastal Plain – The working group of TB/GE/HB hasn't met but is aware local people/groups on the Coastal Plain are trying to improve access. As TB/GE live in the north of the county it would be helpful to have input from members who live/have an interest in the area and asked for volunteers to contact GE. CJ expressed an interest and will contact GE and IH said he could provide contacts for local groups such as Ferring Conservation Group.

Action – CJ to contact GE re bridleways on the Coastal Plain

Action – IH to provide contact details for local groups to GE

Item 3 Defra Higher Level Stewardship access in West Sussex – Members expressed concern over the scale of possible developments at Buck Barn & Adversane and potential effects on access at Knepp Castle. No planning permission has yet been granted. GE will let the Forum know when a decision has been made.

Item 10a - Old Ford to Hunston Canal (Greenway) – GE explained that as COVID restrictions are easing it should be possible for DW to consider leading a walk on the route and for Chris Sprules to provide further information. JN will invite Chris Sprules to the next formal meeting (20/10/21).

Action JN – invite Chris Sprules to next formal meeting

b) Minutes of informal meeting of 17 February 2021

- i. The minutes of the informal meeting on 17 February were approved as correct.
- ii. Actions and matters arising not covered by agenda - all items are on the agenda other than:

Item 10 Lyminster Bypass (top end) – GF explained WSCC is hoping Highways England will come up with some money and is unable to move the scheme forward until there is clarification on this. He is keen to ensure the best outcome for NMUs with appropriate links made and feels this needs to be discussed as early as possible. GE gave assurances that it will be followed up.

Action – GE to ensure Lyminster bypass NMU access is followed up

4. Any urgent matters to be considered not on the agenda

None

5. **West Sussex Rights of Way Annual Report 2020**

The Annual report had been circulated and t NS ran through the key points, emphasising that a lot had been achieved considering it has been a challenging year both with COVID and staff changes. Members expressed appreciation for the work done during difficult times. There followed a question and answer session including:

Q – How has moving teams affected ways of working?

A – There are some benefits being with Highway Operations and in particular with the Highway Inspectors/Stewards, but it's still early days and relationships are likely to continue to develop once face to face contact is permitted.

Q- Does WSCC do repairs on permissive paths?

A – For permissive paths where WSCC has an agreement with the landowner it will depend on what is in the agreement, but typically it would be similar to PRowS with responsibilities shared. Where there is not an agreement it is not something WSCC PRow service would get involved with.

Q - Is WSCC still supportive of permissive paths, such as cycle routes through developments, rather than having definitive PRowS?

A – Being able to have permissive paths is a useful tool to have, as some landowners are not willing to dedicate, however it doesn't not offer the long-term protection that comes with having PRowS. The PRow service would push for a bridleway wherever possible rather than permissive cycling.

Q – Do you supply timber or metal gates?

A – We give the landowner the choice but tend to prefer metal as they last longer.

Q – There is an obstruction (large piece of stone) across a path off the A24, so the path can't be used, and the road has to be used instead. There are no signs on site so would this be an official closure?

A – Official closures will have closure notices on site at either end of path. We also endeavour to add long term closures to the WSCC website. Please let us know of 'unofficial' closures via our '[Report a problem with a Right of Way' webform](#)' so we can investigate. Photos of the problem are helpful in identifying the location.

Q – With increased footfall during lockdown during the wet weather many paths are getting wider. Is this likely to be a problem long term?

A – It is too early really to tell, as every year paths do get muddy but most recover well. We are logging such issues and will know which, if any, paths are not recovering. Landowners have also contacted us with concerns and some paths are being fenced-in, which we can't stop providing the legal width is available.

GE and other members thanked NS and the PRow service.

NS left the meeting

6. **Defra access matters**

a) **Higher Level Stewardship access in West Sussex**

A letter to landowners on the three paths WSLAF felt worth retaining was drafted in 2019. Landowners may of course be waiting to see what is proposed as the replacement to the Common Agricultural Policy, but this isn't due to be in place until 2024. It is also not yet known whether there will be payments to landowners in return for access. GE said that if members think it

still worth writing to the landowners to request for access to continue the letter will need to be reviewed to reflect how much the countryside has been valued during the pandemic and to show an awareness of current trials.

Action - GE to review letter and recirculate

b) Agriculture Act 2020

GE's briefing note on the Agriculture Act 2020 (AA 2020) and Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMS) had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. ELMS are now being trialled, but only 3 of the 72 trials have an access element, so it is important to support the need for access to be included.

GE also explained that there is an inquiry going on at the moment into the introduction and content of ELMS. A joint paper by organisations, including Ramblers, Open Spaces Society and British Canoeing Council, has been published, which makes a good case for payments to be related to access – GE will circulate it.

Action – GE to circulate Ramblers and other orgs paper

GE proposed writing to the Secretary of State (SoS) for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to support the inclusion of access into ELMS, using Hampshire Countryside Access Forum's letter as a guide. GE is also trying to find out if it is possible to submit evidence to the Chairman of the inquiry.

TB reported that the Kent Downs trial seemed quite encouraging, although GE reiterated only 3 of the 72 trials included access so looks to be a low priority.

GF noted this was a country-wide issue and asked what other Forums and County Councils are doing. JN said the priority for WSCC was managing the PRoW network but will make enquiries with colleagues in Legal Services.

Action – JN to enquire if WSCC Legal Services have been involved

GE reported Huddle, the online discussion forum for Local Access Forums, has now closed, which along with the lack of regional/national LAF conferences makes it difficult to liaise with other Forums.

Action – JN to try and obtain a list of LAF Chairmen and Officers

It was agreed WSLAF would write to the Right Honourable George Eustice, SoS, and if appropriate to the Chairman of the inquiry. GE to draft letters and circulate for comments.

Action – GE to draft letters and circulate

7. Consultations and advice

a) Current consultations (None)

b) Consultation responses and updates

i. Rampion Offshore Wind, 'Rampion 2', Evidence gathering

TB thanked everyone for comments on the informal consultation which were well received. The Rights of Way Project Liaison Group (PLG), which TB sits on, should meet a week before the public consultation starts in the summer, at which stage the cable route should be known, along with which PRoW will be affected. It was agreed that the PRoW strategy for Rampion 1 was well managed and it is expected that a similar strategy will be adopted.

CJ raised the kelp forest issues but this is outside WSLAF's remit.

ii. **A281 / Downs Link crossing, Rudgwick**

The online inquest into the cyclist fatality in 2020 is now due to be held on 27 May and it is expected the inspector will make recommendations. WSCC has put in some additional barriers and signage to alert Downs Link users of the road, which is part of the official Strategic Road Network (SRN) used by lorries. Considering the traffic WSLAF is recommending a bridge, which it recognises will be costly.

TB reminded members that a safe crossing here was one of WSLAF's original project proposals. It has now been assessed as part of the Local Transport Improvement Programme (LTIP) and scored highly enough to move forward to the feasibility stage, which will identify more accurate costings. It will then be prioritised against other WSCC schemes for funding and delivery. NV reported that the local WSCC member supports the LTIP scheme for a bridge.

GF recognised and thanked TB for her contribution. There was a discussion about whether a Pegasus crossing could be costed in parallel to a bridge, with the aim to reduce overall timescales for a solution here. NV felt this might be unlikely but will raise with WSCC Highways.

iii. **Friars Oak development; Hassocks footpath 5K, railway underpass**

A plan was shown, and GE explained Network Rail (NR) is keen to close the at-grade rail crossing north of Hassocks due to suicides / near misses. Site visits have taken place with NR and various organisations, including BHS (TB), Ramblers, WSLAF (GE) and the Parish Council. The current footpath crosses the railway on an embankment accessed by a significant number of steps. The proposal is for an underpass which will be 3.3m wide and 2.6m high, which, although slightly less than the ideal height, will be usable by all NMUs if mounting blocks are provided for equestrians.

NR had originally proposed a width of 1.8m for the approach ramps either side of the underpass. At the meetings all organisations requested this width be increased on NR land. GE requested, on WSLAF's behalf, for this to match the width of the underpass, which NR has agreed to – unfortunately consultation was not possible with members due to the speed this happened. Significant development is taking place in this area with potential to gain some new bridleway links, both to the north to Burgess Hill Green Circle and east-west, so this will ensure the new underpass will be able to accommodate all NMUs as a link. TB said NR engineers were helpful and understanding of needs.

TT asked about gradients for equestrians in relation to other projects he is working on. TB said BHS has guidelines and if TT emails her will send some information. **Action - TT/TB to liaise regarding BHS guidelines**

iv. **New Monks Farm Highways Works:** Planning application AWDM/0906/20, Adur District Council

WSLAF has submitted a response to the planning application. MC commented that an email had been circulated to members stating the South Downs National Park Authority had put in a holding objection, so it looks like the proposals will need to be revisited regarding the 4th arm, despite preparations for development already having started on site.

GE commented that one of the issues is giving access to Coombes Road North and potentially creating a rat-run along this windy, narrow lane.

Some objectors considered that the design of the new road doesn't comply with the National Park's policies. CS added that local residents are not in favour of the 4th arm and it seems to be only Lancing College that supports it.

- v. **Strategic development site at Ford (SD8):** Masterplan Document consultation, Arun District Council

WSLAF's response has been circulated to members. GE reported that WSLAF comments had been quoted at the Planning Committee and included that a multi-user path should be provided around the perimeter of the development linked to the wider Rights of Way network, also that the need for a safe east-west route for non-motorised users is important. It was also recommended that the master plan needed revision in two areas 1) the need to demonstrate more clearly the provision for improved access for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians and 2) to reflect more clearly the historical route of the canal through the development, both of which were WSLAF comments. This highlights the importance of commenting on such documents. GE congratulated members on a successful piece of work.

8. **General Report**

The General report was noted. JN reported there is a small number of users who misbehave and take a disproportional amount of time to manage, so if members have the opportunity to push the revised Countryside Code to encourage responsible access it would be appreciated. WSCC is pushing its Think, Share, Be aware campaign, in particular on the Downs Link and Worth Way.

9. **Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

JN took control of the meeting. When invited there was no interest from members to put themselves forward for the role of Charman or Vice-Chairman. JN encouraged others to think about helping out / getting more involved as GE and TB will want to hand over the reins at some stage.

CJ proposed a vote of thanks to GE and TB for their hard work over the last year, which was unanimously supported by those present.

GE was asked if he was willing to re-stand as Chairman, which he was and was unanimously voted in.

TB was asked if she was willing to re-stand as Vice-Chairman, which she was and was unanimously voted in.

Control of the meeting was handed back to GE.

10. **Dates of Next Meetings**

- Informal: Wednesday 14 July 2021 – Online
- Formal: Wednesday 20 October 2021, 10.30am – Horsham if possible or online
- Informal: January TBD
- Formal: Wednesday 27 April 2022 – AGM Chichester/online

Members to let GE know if unable to make any of these dates.

JN to circulate dates for the pre-agenda meetings (PRaM), where the meeting agenda and meeting details are agreed – any member is welcome to attend.

Action – JN to circulate PRaM dates

11. AOB

a) **Scaynes Hill to Lindfield cycle/walkway**

PM had brought this proposed scheme to attention of the Forum and papers had been circulated, although it was appreciated due to the lateness of circulation members may not have had time to read the paper. As PM had a poor connection and was unable to be heard, GE explained the scheme. Promoters were looking for support for a walk/cycle way between Scaynes Hill and Lindfield. There is potential for S106 money for delivery but none for feasibility.

GF feels the proposal put forward is very good and thorough. TB commented that this sort of paper is useful for gaining wide support, which in turn helps getting Councillor support, which is essential for a scheme to succeed.

MC suggested the Forum supports this scheme and was very impressed by the work done in the local community which showed wide local support. GE proposed all to read and send him comments, prior to responding.

Action – All to read paper and send comments to GE

b) **A259 improvement scheme from Felpham to Littlehampton**

CJ raised concerns about lack of NMU connectivity in the A259 improvement scheme. WSCC has said they will look at options for provision of suitable crossing for NMUs.

GF said it is important to get in early to ensure appropriate provision for NMUs is provided to avoid a scenario like the A27. However, he feels that with all the current legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), the Council should already be looking to make suitable provision.

c) **Middleton-on-Sea; improvement of footpaths for disabled access**

CJ explained Middleton-on-Sea is looking into footpath improvements for disabled access via CIL funding, and asked JN if she could provide contacts for local parishes, Yapton, Ford, Climping and Felpham. JN said it would be helpful to understand which paths are being considered.

Action - CJ to liaise with JN

d) **Access Rangers and Countryside Rangers**

JN explained, having been asked by GF, that an Access Ranger works for the PRoW team and look after PRoWs, while Countryside Rangers manage the countryside sites, which although has an access element generally doesn't include PRoW matters.

e) **Appointment of Councillors to WSLAF**

GF asked how Councillors are appointed to WSLAF. JN explained she completes a form identifying what WSCC councillor involvement is required. Pete Bradbury had already resigned from the Forum and DW is not standing for re-election. WSCC Democratic Services, working with cabinet members, make the appointment and new WSCC representatives should be known before the next WSLAF meeting.

The meeting ended at 12.30pm.