



West Sussex Local Access Forum

Annual Report: February 2014 – January 2015

Chairman's Introduction

This West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) Annual Report 2014/2015 is the fourth I have introduced and will be my last as Chairman. The past four years have been very rewarding, and I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to lead WSLAF. I could not have done so without the enthusiastic support of Members, who I would like to thank for all their help and ideas over the past four years. Special thanks must go to Jane Noble, our Forum Officer, finding the time to support us has become more difficult due to budgetary cutbacks and work pressure, and the Forum appreciates the effort she has made to help us work effectively.



As you read our Report I hope you will agree that 2014 has been a very good year for WSLAF. We have seen the successful delivery of major projects on the ground that we have been working on for some time. To see walkers, cyclists and equestrians using and enjoying safe routes we have helped to create is very satisfying!!

I believe strongly that a committed, active and purposeful Forum can achieve a great deal in the world of public rights of way and access. WSLAF is actively recruiting new members, so do come and join us at a meeting and help to make a difference – you will be very welcome!!

Tricia Butcher - Chairman

WSLAF Meetings

Our formal meetings, one in Horsham and three in Chichester, so that we could include a site visit to Medmerry, included the following presentations:

- Tom Weedon (WSCC Volunteer Co-ordinator) – Update on work of WSCC Public Rights of Way (PRoW) volunteers.
- Martin Leigh-Pollitt (Steyning & District Community Partnership) - Access for All Route, Bramber
- Charlotte Weller (WSCC Countryside Services Manager) – WSCC Future Council
- Jon Perks (WSCC Principal RoW Officer) – WSCC PRoW Annual Review
- Ruth Fletcher (Horsham District Cycle Forum) – Horsham to Southwater Cycle Link
- Clive Robey (Network Rail) – Update on PRoW Level Crossing Closures
- James Osman (NFU) and Derek Crush (WS Farmer) – Access and Land Management: Opportunities and Solutions



Volunteers install a kissing gate

Working Group

The working group set up in Oct 2013, to assist WSCC with plans for a campaign to recruit more WSLAF members, continued its work through the early part of the year. The campaign was finally launched in October 2014 with a letter to Parish Councils, together with information and an application form on our website, and we plan to roll this out to other interested (we hope) parties shortly. The initial response has been very encouraging.



Summary of WSLAF work

Consultations and advice

Through the year Members have read and responded to various consultations, and strategic planning applications. Our Position Statement has been a useful tool as a starting point in setting out the Forum's aims. We have always sought to promote the importance of PRow and access to local councils and have been encouraged this year to see Local Plans including some very good policies and wording in this regard.



Measuring a bridge to be replaced

We have given advice to WSCC promoting schemes for non-motorised users (NMUs) in the Strategic Transport Investment Programme, and sought protection for PRow and NMUs in the Joint West Sussex Minerals Local Plan. Most importantly, in our view, WSCC sought our advice on their review of the 9 month PRow Inspection Cycle. Although Members regretted the implementation of budgetary cuts that made the review necessary, and the lack of evidence of the implications of the change on the service, we were all agreed that a proactive inspection cycle is vitally important, and a matter of pride and principle. In view of this, a 15 month cycle option was our preferred choice, together with a reviewed, and hopefully increased, summer clearance programme, more involvement of Parish Councils and volunteers in the delivery of inspections and tasks on the ground, and a more user friendly on-line problem reporting system.

We continue to foster a good working relationship with the Highways Agency, in order to gain maximum NMu benefits from plans and proposed schemes for trunk roads. We have also responded to the Canal and River Trust's consultation on Towpath Use, which included a very good Towpath Code, Gatwick Airport's Runway Options Consultation, within our remit of protecting and seeking creation and improvement of NMu facilities in the surrounding area, and commented on Department for Transport's Cycling Delivery Plan.

All consultation responses and advice letters are available to view on our website.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

Forum involvement with implementation and delivery of RoWIP projects was a priority we set ourselves in 2014. We continue to liaise closely with Network Rail regarding PRow level crossing closures, and with the Forestry Commission regarding additional routes at Eartham Woods and their new Stakeholder Engagement Framework. Our key achievements over 2014 are set out below:

Medmerry - The area of land south of Chichester is known as the Manhood Peninsula, and just to the west of Selsey Bill is an area of coastline known locally as Medmerry. Over the years the Environment Agency (EA) has spent thousands of pounds to shore up the shingle beaches to prevent flooding of 300 houses and large caravan sites, but following consultation it was decided a more natural way would be to allow the beach to erode and provide 7km of new defences inland.



Forum Members visit Medmerry

EA worked closely with the local community and WSLAF was represented on the Stakeholder Group giving advice on access issues. The beach, which had provided a direct link for walkers and cyclists between Selsey to the east and Earnley and Bracklesham to the west, was to be severed so compensatory new routes for walkers, cyclists and equestrians were sought. There are now 10km of new footpaths, cycle tracks and bridleways linking the communities and giving access to a series of viewpoints around the periphery of the site, which EA has now offered to dedicate. A great result! WSLAF continues to be involved on a new group Green Links Around the Manhood (GLAM), which has drawn up an aspirational schedule of new routes to link the communities of the Manhood, which accords with the RoWIP.

Highways Agency (HA) - A23 Handcross to Warninglid Scheme -

When two of our Members appeared in front of the Inspector at the Public Inquiry into this scheme in June 2009, they could not have envisaged what a huge improvement to NMU facilities their attendance would make. HA completed the scheme in Nov/Dec 2014 and the two north-south NMU routes are wide, protected, screened where necessary, safe paths that are being well used and enjoyed by all. HA has formally dedicated the western route as bridleway (including the subway), and once the planting has matured the path will meander through woodland. WSLAF will continue to try and obtain an eastern bridleway link from the subway.



The new bridleway by the A23

Downs Link (Bramber A283 crossing)

What a difference a year makes! WSLAF's involvement was pivotal in the initial investigations and negotiations that made this project, to provide an alternative safe route for NMUs using the Downs Link under the A283 at Bramber, feasible. Once the route had been secured, with partnership help from WSCC, South Downs National Park Authority, South Downs Local Access Forum, Bramber Parish Council, and a local landowner, work began to deliver the path on the ground. Included in the work was a WSLAF supported Steyning Community Partnership 'Access for All' wheelchair route along the bank of the River Adur. Due to inclement weather work had to be suspended over the winter and remedial works will be necessary in the Spring when there will be an official opening, although the path has been opened for use in the meantime. For over 30 years users of the Downs Link have sought, and campaigned for, an alternative to the at grade A283 crossing here, and WSLAF is delighted and proud to have played a part in delivering it.



The new culvert taking for the realigned Downs Link bridleway at Bramber

Looking Forward

Recruitment will continue to be a priority in 2015, seeking to increase membership from sectors not currently represented.

The Forum will also continue to develop RoWIP projects on the ground where possible, actively looking for projects where our support and assistance will facilitate improvements to access.

Contact the Forum/further information

WSLAF meeting dates, agenda, minutes, consultation responses and list of members can be found on the Forum's website:

www.wslaf.org

Members of the public are always welcome to attend our meetings as observers.

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If this information is required in an alternate format please contact us and we will try to meet your needs.