

# West Sussex Local Access Forum

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5 October 2022

Sent by email to:  
Greening Steyning Sustainable Transport Group

Dear Mr Owen

## **Re: Steyning/Downs Link Active Travel Proposal**

I am responding to the above consultations on behalf of 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](http://www.wslaf.org).

The Forum is generally supportive of Active Travel initiatives which will benefit walkers, cyclists, horse riders and the differently abled and it has a responsibility to represent the interest of all these Non-Motorised users (NMUs). We are aware of WSCC's reply to your initial email which confirms their position that the Downs Link (DL) should remain as a multi-user leisure route and states the difficulties of land ownership and funding associated with any changes to the current route.

The DL is a long-distance recreational route, as confirmed by WSCC and a definitive bridleway which is available to all NMUs. Many use short sections of the DL to link with other parts of the access network while others will enjoy longer sections or the whole length from Guildford to Shoreham. We believe that Active Travellers wishing to take advantage of the DL to make journeys to school, work, local services or for leisure can already do so.

The Proposal to 'upgrade' part of the DL around Steyning to prioritise cycling and to change the surface to a bound sealed finish would significantly disadvantage all other users, effectively reducing access, which The Forum could not support. Sealed surfaces of the type proposed are not suitable for horses and are not favoured by walkers which will be a deterrent to use and will reduce the benefit of the DL.

A bound surface will also tend to increase the speed of cyclists and increase the safety risks to other users. We note the comment in the Proposal for the need for cyclists to be able to move at speed. The DL is primarily a leisure route, mainly through rural locations and a change to this section as proposed would radically alter the nature of the

route, and this part would then have a different character to the remainder of the route to the north. The DL is used a lot by dog walkers, families, and close residents for short walks which benefit their health and wellbeing and this is particularly the case in the winter months when many adjacent paths are beset by wet and muddy conditions.

Members are already aware of, and have experienced, the conflict which can occur between cyclists and walkers. Parts of the DL surfacing were upgraded relatively recently using funding from the EU, which raised some complaints from the local residents who believed that this 'improvement' to the surface only served to speed up cyclists increasing the risks to walkers.

We note the inclusion of comments in the Proposal concerning a proposed realignment of the DL to use the original disused railway line to the north of the Bramber roundabout. There are currently no agreements or discussions with the current landowners to change the route and possible funding has not been secured or the sources identified. Both of these issues will significantly prolong the timescale for any alteration to the current situation.

Members of the Forum were very actively involved in securing the 'off-puttingly long' detour of the DL to the River Adur and under the A283, to provide an alternative to the dangerous at-grade crossing. This was a very lengthy and expensive procedure. The DL can already be used as a linking route, but access could be improved with the provision of more feeder routes for all users and if the Steyning Greening Group was to be successful in working with landowners in delivering such routes they would be welcomed.

There is a dissenting view of the response shown above from a Member, who has a cycling interest, who supported the proposals.

The Forum would welcome being updated on progress on the proposed Scheme, and to future involvement regarding NMU matters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Noble', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jane Noble, Forum Officer  
West Sussex Local Access Forum

Copy for information to: All WSLAF members