

West Sussex Local Access Forum



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Sent by email to:

WSCC: To Paul Marshall, Leader, WSCC
Cc Deborah Urquhart, Cabinet Member for the Environment and Climate Change
HDC: To Cllr James Wright, Chairman Environment & Rural Affairs Policy Development
Advisory Group
Cc Paul Anderson, Director of Communities
SDNPA: To Andrew Lee, Director of Countryside Policy and Management
Springhead Estate

Dear Sirs

Kithurst Hill Car Park

I am responding to the recent statements concerning the future of above 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.

When West Sussex County Council (WSCC) decided to terminate the agreement with Springhead Estate to manage the car park at Kithurst Hill in October 2019 due to budget restrictions, the Forum remained optimistic that the parties involved (WSCC, SDNPA, Springhead Estate) would be able to negotiate a suitable agreement to keep the car park open.

We appreciate the efforts that have been made by WSCC to put temporary measures in place over the last 3 years, while trying to find an agreed solution. The recent Joint Statement dated 11th November 2022 enabled us to understand more of the background to and rationale for the decision to focus resources on sites owned by WSCC.

We are also aware of the Statement by Friends of the South Downs, and the later Statement from WSCC on the 18th November, advising that there are constructive talks

taking place with the interested parties, such that WSCC has agreed to extend its management of the site until the end of January 2023 in order to facilitate a third party management agreement and secure the car park's future. This commitment is welcomed by Forum members.

Whilst we understand the financial pressures all parties are subject to, the Forum's interest and remit is to maintain and improve public access to the countryside. We are, therefore, concerned that the closure of this popular car park will have a detrimental effect on access.

The car park is a good size and is located at a very scenic section of the Downs. It provides a good base from which walkers, cyclists and equestrians are able to access the South Downs Way (SDW) and explore a wide range of paths. It is particularly useful for the less able who can currently access and enjoy the views from one of the high points of the Downs, but who would be unable to do so without the assistance of a vehicle.

It is widely recognized that access to the countryside gives huge benefits to the mental and physical health for all users, which was widely appreciated during the pandemic.

Although free parking is available at Chantry Hill, it is smaller and likely to become full at busy periods. Closure of Kithurst Hill car park will also produce displacement parking locally, causing obstruction to other road and access track users and possible damage to fauna. We note that road verges close to the car park contain SSSIs.

The solution to the problem is in finding a funding mechanism which can be supported by all parties involved in the recent negotiations. We urge everyone to make strenuous efforts to find adequate funding, possibly through a shared funding model. A key requirement for the Estate is the indemnity currently provided by WSCC. All public liabilities arising from the use of this area as a car park need to be covered.

Although our interest is essentially for the public health benefits of maintaining access to the countryside, it is also one of the stated aims of a National Park, to enable and increase access for everyone. We ask all parties to consider all funding avenues available to ensure that the car park remains open.

Yours sincerely

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

Jane Noble, Forum Officer
West Sussex Local Access Forum

Copy for information to: All WSLAF members