



West Sussex Local Access Forum

Introduction

As part of its ongoing work programme West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) regularly responds to planning consultations and comments on strategic planning applications. For more information about the Forum visit www.wslaf.org

Our Position Statement is a document that outlines the Forum's position on various issues relating to access and public rights of way (PRoWs – Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic) within and around new development, briefly sets out our concerns and what we hope will be done.

Countryside Access Position Statement

The Forum believes:

A new housing development should not be designed in isolation and must not become a barrier to countryside access for residents - rather it should provide a "gateway" from the urban area into the wider countryside.

New development can provide a unique opportunity to solve present problems and provide missing links in the network of PRoWs which are the principal means to access the countryside. This will enhance the ability of local people, both existing and new residents, to enjoy access to the countryside.

The PRoW network is part of our heritage - many paths are historic routes closely connected to the history of the local community. Wherever possible, a new housing development should retain existing PRoWs on their existing line; they should be seen as part of a wider network. Sometimes, they will be alongside or contained between hedges and trees - this rural character should be retained as it will give the path a visual and wildlife link to the farmland and woodlands beyond. Efforts should always be made to retain or indeed enhance the amenity value of the PRoW within and surrounding the development.

Where existing footpaths are to be upgraded, this should aim to make the path available to as wide a group of users as possible, for example by upgrading to a bridleway rather than a cycleway.

In the past, new housing developments have sometimes resulted in the urbanisation of PRoWs, and the loss of their rural characteristics which can diminish their value to residents. The Forum would seek to maintain the rural character of such paths to maintain the maximum amenity value to all users.

PRoWs should be linked with other open spaces and green corridors within the development, as well as to the wider countryside network. A new housing development will inevitably place greater pressure on the wider path network with the increased demand for access. Some path surfaces will need to be improved and it may be desirable, for example, to upgrade a footpath to bridleway status so that it can provide a safe off-road link for all users.

Many minor roads are used as links in the PRow network. Any significant increase in the volume and speed of vehicles using these roads makes them unsafe for vulnerable users (walkers, cyclists, equestrians), and fragments the PRow network. In such circumstances, consideration should be given to the creation of new off-road routes, or the upgrading of existing PRow to provide safe traffic-free routes for all users.

Where structures have to be added to the path network within a development, these should always aim to ensure that the path remains accessible to as wide and diverse a group of users as possible.

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