



Meeting of the West Sussex Local Access Forum

Wednesday 17 April 2024

A meeting of the West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) was held at **10.30am, Wednesday 17 April 2024**, at County Hall Chichester.

Minutes (Draft)

Present

Graham Elvey (GE) – Chairman	Phil Miles (PM)
Tricia Butcher (TB) – Vice-Chairman	Carol Montgomery (CM)
Monica Collingham (MC)	David Purcell (DP)
David Green (DG)	

WSSC Officers

Jane Noble (JN)	Forum Officer, WSCC
Neil Vigar (NV)	Countryside Services Manager
Nick Scott (NS)	Principal Rights of Way Officer (part)
Steve Alexander	Access Ranger Area 6
Lysiane Dallen	Access Ranger Area 3 (part)

Chichester Harbour National Landscape

Richard Austin (RA)	Director (part)
Keith Rathbone	Lead Ranger (part)
Ross Jones	Operations Manager (part)

1. Apologies and welcomes

GE welcomed Richard Austin from Chichester Harbour National Landscape.

GE also welcomed WSCC Officers and the Forum was introduced to new Access Rangers Steve Alexander, who covers Area 6 in the east of the County from Crawley to Shoreham, and Lysiane Dallen, who works three days a week and covers Area 3b, which include some parishes in the north-east of West Sussex down to Bersted and Yapton on the coastal plain.

Apologies had been received from Geoff Farrell (GF) and Nicol Beard (NB).

2. Minutes of the Forum

a) Minutes of formal meeting of 18 October 2023

- i. The minutes of the formal meeting held on 18 October 2023 were approved as correct.
- ii. Items relating to actions and matters arising are either on the agenda or had been completed other than:

Item 2a(ii) – (Item 2b(i)) Planning Application DM/22/3806 Bluebell Railway. JN had circulate information regarding continuation of access if planning permission is granted to reinstate the railway so Permissive Footpath P1, which links the southern end of Public Footpath 11AR with Public Footpath

25A will not be able to run along its current line. An option is to drop the path to the bottom of the embankment on the southern side to run parallel to the existing route. However, a DMMO application has been received by WSCC to add a new footpath heading south from 11AR to 25AR, near Bursteye Farm. If this is successful, the permissive path is unlikely to be retained.

Item 4 – High Weald National Landscape Access Presentation – Simon Fathers. JN had circulated the presentation slides.

b) Minutes of informal meeting of 7 February 2024

- i. Items relating to actions and matters arising are either on the agenda, have an update in the General report or have been completed other than:

Item 7 – Consultees for Public Path Order (PPO) process - GE had circulated the response received from Ami Dye, WSCC Officer, detailing the statutory consultees.

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

DP requested the level crossing closure proposed at Yapton by Network Rail be discussed in Any Other Business.

4. Chichester Harbour Natural Landscape

Richard Austin, Director of Chichester Harbour National Landscape, delivered a presentation on access work and challenges in Chichester Harbour. He reminded members that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty had recently been rebranded in November 2023 as National Landscapes and that access in the harbour covers both on land and on the water. It includes 56.7 miles of footpaths and 7.5 miles of permissive paths.

RA commented on the good relation they have with WSCC PRow team, in particular with Kathy Eels, the local Access Ranger. He introduced Ross Jones, Operations Manager, who is very new to the organisation, and Keith Rathbone, Lead Ranger, who has been with them for many years and helps deliver access maintenance and improvements in partnership with WSCC, such as vegetation cutting and surfacing schemes. Often their staff can be on site quicker than WSCC if needed.

The current Chichester Harbour Management Plan runs from 2019-2024, but has been extended by 12 months, while work is undertaken on a new Management Plan for the period 2025-2030. A public consultation will take place in the summer of 2024 and comments will be welcomed from WSLAF.

The section of the King Charles III England Coast Path around Chichester Harbour is still waiting for approval by the Secretary of State. There are many challenges for the Path, particularly as many areas either flood at very high tides or are suffering coastal erosion with no easy solutions.

A Natural England review reports that the Harbour is declining in quality. Coastal squeeze is a significant issue. Hard coastal defences prevent the natural roll back of coastal areas and desirable features, such as salt marsh, are often squeezed out. RA would like to see a lot less hard barriers so there is a more natural process of realignment, but this is difficult with homes and businesses, including agriculture. Where water overflows defences erosion happens from behind, eroding paths. It is getting harder to get approval for works and Natural England is likely to ask for proof you can't roll back before giving approval for defence work.

Significant parts of the coast path are suffering from erosion and RA showed slides showing erosion at many sites. Some paths have now been closed as not deemed safe for the public to use.

He ended saying that access is one of the functions of Chichester Harbour and people need to be able to enjoy it! He asked for support and understanding of the restoration of Chichester Harbour and of roll back of coastal footpaths.

GE thanked RA and his team for their good work around the Harbour and for his informative and thought-provoking presentation.

DP reported that he had asked Ramblers central office for their position on roll-back and was waiting for an answer.

5. West Sussex Rights of Way Annual Report 2023

The report had been circulated with the meeting papers. Nick Scott (NS), WSCC Principal Rights of Way Officer, highlighted the key work delivered on the Rights of Way network in 2023, including routine maintenance, capital larger scales surfacing and bridge works, improving accessibility by providing gates for stiles and volunteer work. WSCC's PRoW routine contractor, County Tree Surgeons, continues to be flexible to allow emergencies to be dealt with promptly. The work of volunteers, helping with both inspections and practical work, continues to be appreciated. A number of 5-6m bridges have been installed by the volunteers helping keep the network open and safe to use. Horsted Keynes Hackers volunteers continue to deliver maintenance and improvements in the parish and this year a Ramblers group of volunteers have become established, mainly tackling some overgrown paths.

NS also outlined that he had spent much time working with other organisations, including those involved with Rampion 2 and Gatwick northern runway schemes, to protect and enhance the network.

A short question and answer session followed including:

- NS was asked how many planning applications WSCC PRoW responds to. He explained many do not require a response, for example where a garage is being built adjacent to the Public Right of Way (PRoW). He is unsure of numbers but will aim to include this information in next year's report.
- When asked how successful WSCC PRoW team is in gaining new and upgraded routes through the planning system, in particular for equestrians, NS explained Donna Tretheway, who deals with the larger planning applications, has been in post for several years, however the planning process can take years to get to delivery on site. WSCC does request equestrian access, however there is no statutory framework to support such infrastructure and equestrian access is often viewed as recreational. In contrast there is a big push by the Government for walking and cycling schemes to be delivered as part of new developments, via the Active Travel platform, with permissive cycling routes often being favoured over Public Bridleways. It is also disappointing to see schemes watered down between the master plan stage and delivery on the ground, such as at Kilnwood Vale. NS assured the Forum that WSCC would continue to push and is pleased that in Horsted Keynes the underpass has been built to equestrian standards and 5K and 11K will be upgraded to Bridleway.

GE thanked NS and the PRoW service for their hard work.

6. Consultations and advice

a) Current consultations

- i. **Proposed changes to legislation for electrically assisted pedal cycles – Department of Transport.** Closing date 25/4/24. GE thanked all for their input and the response has been sent and circulated to members.
- ii. **Durrington to Goring Transport Improvement Scheme – WSCC.** Closing date 30/4/24. WSLAF will not be responding.

GE reported that he receives a number of consultations that need local knowledge. He will circulate these and if any WSLAF member wants to lead/respond for WSLAF that would be welcomed, otherwise the Forum will not be responding.

b) Consultation responses, advice given

Members noted the responses sent since the last formal meeting:

- i. **Draft High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029** – High Weald AONB Unit
- ii. **Active Travel in West Sussex; West Sussex Active Travel 2023-2036 and Draft West Sussex Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)** – West Sussex County Council

7. WSLAF matters

a) Website including Members' interests

Website – JN reported the WSLAF website had been updated, including the additional of the leaflet revised by CM. She advised there are still a few consultations waiting to be uploaded.

Action – JN to add consultations to WSLAF web

Members Interests – Some members have not attended meetings for a while and need to be contacted to check still willing to be part of the Forum.

Action – JN to check membership and ensure active

CM had collated members interests. All to check theirs are correct by the end of May.

Action – Member to check interests and advise CM of errors/additions

- b) **WSLAF support** – JN advised draft minutes would be circulated within three weeks.
- c) **Recruitment** – Recruitment needs to be targeted so will assess how best to do this when the members' interests document is complete so we can identify the gaps. Facebook was suggested as an option.
- d) **Members' priorities (future topics/training)**

An Officer from Network Rail was suggested as a possible speaker.

8. General Report

The General Report was noted.

Rampion -TB stated she had included WSCC's response the last information she had circulated.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Event, Aldingbourne – NV reported that this event was particularly interesting as it was not a specific countryside event, so it was interesting to hear from the attendees who may not often use the countryside.

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

TB announced she is standing down as Vice Chairman but is still happy to remain as a member on the Forum. Members and Officers thanked her for her valuable and knowledgeable input over the years, both as Vice-Chairman and also as a former Chairman.

GE and TB gave a brief outline of the work involved in the role of Chairman and Vice Chairman. They emphasised the need to work collaboratively and reach a consensus. The Chairman works closely with both the Forum Secretary, JN, and the Vice-Chairman and work includes:

- Formal meetings - Inputting into agendas, including suggesting speakers, running the meetings and checking the minutes .
- Informal meetings – producing the agenda, running the meeting and producing notes (though notes could be taken by another member).
- Consultations – signing up to bulletins from various organisations, circulating consultation documents and input / inviting other to lead on the response, pulling together and sending off responses.
- Recruitment of New Members – help the Forum Officer with recruitment and training.

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.

GE was asked if he was willing to re-stand as Chairman, which he was but commented that he would like to step down shortly. He was unanimously voted in. Members thanked him for his continued involvement in this capacity.

No-one was prepared to stand as Vice-Chairman, although MC agreed to proof-read documents as required.

Control of the meeting was handed back to GE.

10. **Dates of Next Formal Meetings**

- Informal: Wednesday 10 July 2024, Horsham
- Formal: Wednesday 30 October 2024 – County Hall, Chichester

11. **AOB**

DP had received a notification from Network Rail about their intent to close a crossing in Yapton and divert Footpath 325 to the east to use an alternate crossing point. It was agreed he would circulate details to members for comment.

Action – DP to circulate NR closure details and Members to comment

The meeting finished at 12.10pm