

South Downs

Local Access Forum

ANNUAL REPORT: APRIL 2011–OCTOBER 2012

A few words from the Chairman

This is the first annual report of the newest Local Access Forum in Britain's most recent National Park.

A Local Access Forum (LAF) is a group of up to 22 members who give advice to various government authorities and other bodies on how to provide access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment. They must consider the needs of land management as well as conservation of the natural beauty of the area.

The South Downs National Park Authority became responsible for appointing a LAF when it started operationally in April 2011. A LAF is a statutory body and, by law, the organisations that it advises must take note of that advice. It's important that the LAF has a range of members that reflect the views of both land managers and recreational users of the countryside.

Before the creation of the National Park, the Sussex Downs Conservation Board and then the South Downs Joint Committee supported a non-statutory forum. A number of the new South Downs LAF (SDLAF) members joined us from this forum, while others came from neighbouring forums across our geographical area.

It's also important for the forum to include members who represent the interests of conservation, tourism, people with disabilities,

transport and other interests. We are fortunate that our members have a wide range of interests, which means that access users are well represented. We are also particularly grateful to have three farmers and a land agent to help us keep our feet firmly on the ground.

The National Park purposes have a major influence upon our work. These are:

- *To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area*
- *To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Park's special qualities by the public*

The South Downs National Park Authority's role is to pursue the Purposes of the National Park and in doing so, has a duty to:

- *Seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the communities living within the National Park.*

The SDLAF will play a key role in helping the Authority to pursue these purposes and carry out its duty. We will ensure that balanced advice is given about improving and increasing the opportunities for people to enjoy the beautiful and varied landscapes that make up the South Downs National Park.

Glynn Jones

Chairman, South Downs Local Access Forum





Site visit at Amberley



Visit to Ebernoe Common

Key achievements

In its first seven meetings, the South Downs LAF (SDLAF) has considered a range of subjects, some of which are outlined below. Its advice has been sought by County Councils, the South Downs National Park Authority, The South Downs Way National Trail and DEFRA amongst others, and it has responded to several consultations. It has also received presentations providing information and raising awareness to the SDLAF members on National Park and access issues.

Memorandum of Understanding

The creation of a new LAF for the National Park meant that existing LAFs in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Hampshire and West Sussex handed over parts of the area for which they were previously the statutory forum. Members from all of these LAFs were keen to build good working relationships, so a Memorandum of Understanding was put together and signed by all of the Chairs in January 2012. This commits the LAFs to good communication and sharing expertise from their local areas. Attendance of visiting LAF members is welcomed at meetings and there have been members of other LAFs at all meetings.

Rights of Way and Access Accord

From the formation of the National Park, SDLAF members were concerned about how rights of way and access would be looked after, including the roles of the local highway authorities and the SDNPA. The SDLAF helped to inform and monitor the development of the Rights of Way and Access Accord, and will continue to monitor how it works in practice. It also offers advice to the County Councils (and Unitary Authority i.e. Brighton & Hove) who retain responsibility for managing and maintaining the RoW network, and to the SDNPA who are responsible for Access Land.

South Downs Management Plan (SDMP)

SDLAF are an important consultee in the development of the SDMP. The subject is a standing item at LAF meetings, and members

were invited to attend Technical Working Groups in September 2011. Three members sit on the South Downs Partnership, which oversees the development of the SDMP.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)

SDLAF contributed to the process of preparing the LSTF bid. It helped to prioritise potential schemes to be included, and as a result £3.81 million has been secured for sustainable transport projects across the South Downs, New Forest and six local highway authority areas.

Fencing Common Land

Vice Chair Sue Dunkley made a site visit to Telscombe Tye, an area of Common Land in East Sussex. SDLAF supported the principle of fencing to allow grazing, as long as good accessible gates are included in the scheme.

SDLAF were also consulted on a proposal to fence Graffham Common to allow management by grazing. They supported the proposal after assurance from the Sussex Wildlife Trust that high quality access would be included.

Meon Valley route of South Downs Way

SDLAF supported the continued use of temporary routes through the Meon Valley. This is based on the understanding that the desired route will still be actively pursued while solutions are found for major issues that need to be overcome.

Disabled Access

SDLAF have developed a strong consensus that access to the countryside for disabled users needs to be provided and improved. In January 2012, the SDLAF received a presentation from David Livermore of Hampshire Roamability, a disabled ramblers group that use trampers (heavy duty electric wheelchairs that can be used on rough terrain). This meeting was also attended by members of 4 Sight Ramblers who highlighted the challenges experienced in the countryside by walkers with all levels of visual impairments.



Walkers at the Long Man of Wilmington



Signing the Memorandum of Understanding

Conflicts with wildlife and farming

In April 2012, SDLAF visited Ebernoe Common in West Sussex to consider how to manage Rights of Way at a sensitive site for bats and other wildlife. The SDLAF were also consulted by Hants CC on Dog Control Orders for Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Hampshire, which were needed to protect sheep from dog attacks and to ensure continued grazing of the downland.

Providing Access To Hampshire's Heritage (PATHH)

Member Terry Doyle has represented the SDLAF on the PATHH Project Steering Committee. The project, initiated by the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum, researches old documents to see if there is any strong evidence which would satisfy modern requirements to enable routes to be recorded as rights of way. A team of around 100 volunteers have identified routes that will be tested to see if they can be added to the definitive map before the 2026 cut-off date.

Advice given

Letters:

- **Eastbourne bridleway:** Supported the South Downs Way (SDW) officer and the SDW Partnership on the creation of a new route for the Eastbourne bridleway/footpath end of the route, enabling a common start/finish point for the SDW and improving access
- **'Future of Forests' Independent Panel's call for views:** SDLAF's response encouraged promotion and provision of public access to private and publically owned woodland. It also suggested that any sale of land should include protection of access, dedication and higher rights. The final report from the panel echoed these principles and Defra is now considering the report
- **England Access Forum:** Letter to Richard Benyon MP expressing concern about the loss of the EAF, which provided a unified national voice for LAFs. The letter also

expressed reservations about an online forum and stressed the importance of regional coordinators to provide structure and act as a conduit for information from government

- **Countryside management:** Letter to Brighton & Hove City Council expressing concerns over the loss of posts related to countryside management. The countryside in this area is a vital link for many visitors and residents accessing the Downs, so it must be well maintained
- **Decadal review of Map of Open Country and Common Land:** Letter requesting no further delay in the commencement of a review. This is an opportunity for landowners to challenge areas that are perhaps incorrectly mapped and for anomalously missed areas and common land in East Sussex to be added
- **Ouse Valley Cycle Network:** Letter supporting the bid to the Paths for Communities fund. Funding would be used on part of a proposed cycle path between Lewes and Newhaven. Natural England have stipulated that LAFs should be consulted on these bids
- **Rampion wind farm:** Letter to E.ON regarding concerns over the cable route and also to SDNPA encouraging close liaison on the development

Future

- Ongoing consultation on development of the South Downs Management Plan
- Investigating conflicts and solutions related to cycling
- Conflicts with dog walkers including professional dog walking services
- Monitoring Defra's conclusions and policy regarding Future of Forests
- Access on MoD land in conjunction with Hampshire Countryside Access Forum
- Development of Rights of Way improvement schemes
- Connectivity on Access Land

SDLAF Members

Name	Interest	Elected member/member of other LAF
David Ashcroft	Land manager	East Hampshire District, HCAF
Val Bateman	Horse riding	Funtington Parish
Dave Brookshaw	South Downs Society, Volunteer Ranger	B&HLAF
Russell Cleaver (appointed Oct 2012)	Countryside management, Volunteer Ranger Service	
Bob Damper	Cycling	
Terry Doyle (resigned Oct 2012)	Volunteer Ranger Service, woodland owner, Walking for Health leader	
Sue Dunkley	Disabled access	
Andy Hannaford	Education and adventure recreation	
Neville Harrison	Walker	SDNPA
Simon James (appointed Jan 2012)	Forestry Commission	
Richard Johnson (appointed Oct 2012)	Public transport	
Glynn Jones	South Downs Society	WSLAF
Roger Mullenger	Orienteering, Scouts, nature reserve volunteer	Liss Parish
Pat Neal (resigned July 2012)	Public transport	
David Taylor	Land manager	
Jo Taylor	Walker, cyclist, trail runner	
Andrew Thomas	Land agent	Easebourne Parish Council
Tom Tupper	Land manager	SDNPA
John Vannuffel	Trail motorcyclist	B&HLAF
David Williamson (resigned Nov 2011)	Forestry Commission	

Meetings

Date	No. of Members	No. of Officers (Incl. secretary / minute taker)	No. of Observers
16.05.2011	15	5	5
14.07.2011	14	6	5
13.10.2011	16	4	7
12.01.2012	11	5	10
24.04.2012	14	6	4
17.07.2012	10	6	12
09.10.2012	13	6	5

Links/contact

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c/o Tim Squire

South Downs National Park Authority

Stanmer Park

Lewes Road

Brighton

BNI 9SE

SDLAF is a statutory forum administered by the SDNPA

Budget

Date	Venue	Room hire £s	Catering £s
16.05.11	Arundel Town Hall	189	151
14.07.11	Arundel Town Hall	156	145
13.10.11	Arundel Town Hall	335	157
12.01.12	Arundel Town Hall	241	175
24.04.12	Lurgashall Village Hall	50	167
17.07.12	Pulborough Village Hall	146	137
09.10.12	Amberley Museum	125	240
Total		1,242	1,172

Members travel expenses total: **£658**

Total running costs: **£3,073**

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