

South Downs Local Access Forum (SDLAF)

Date: Thursday 31 October 2024

Time: 10:00 – 12:30

Location: Chanctonbury, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, GU29 9DH

Notes & Actions

Attendees:

LAF Members

Andrew Shaxson – (AS)	Attending
Tim Burr – (TB)	Attending
Doug Jones – (DJ)	Attending
Bob Damper – (BD)	Attending
Carolyn Fair – (CF)	Attending
Glynn Jones (GJ)	Attending
Richard Johnson – (RJ)	Attending
Robert Whitcombe – (RW)	Attending
Roger Mullenger – (RM)	Attending

SDNPA Officers

Andy Gattiker – (AG) Chair	Attending
Nigel James – (NJ)	Attending
Laura Sercombe – (LS)	Attending
Ashia Ciesielczuk – (AC)	Attending
Anne Rehill (AR)	Attending
Kim Greaves – (KG)	Attending
Laura Sercombe – (LS)	Attending

Guests

Abby Sullivan, Hampshire County Council - (AbS)	Attending (Online)
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1. Welcome, apologies

John Vannuffel – Apologies
Simon James - Apologies

2. Items for AOB

- Update to the Centurion Way extension.
- Glover landscape review.
- Partnership Management Plan steering group member – Covered in AR presentation
- State of the rights of way network in East and West Sussex.
- Legislation that governs the forum – check to see if still compliant.

3. Notes of previous meeting

Action 1: Chair and Vice Chair will be voted on in this meeting.

Action's 2 & 3: A subgroup for byways was set up to support Hampshire LAF.

Action 4: A few PROW and LCWIP consultations have been shared via teams since the last meeting. We will look at picking this up again.

Action 5: The Highway authorities collect data in different ways. None of the Highway authorities could supply data apart from outstanding issues, but this data could be used to look at any trends.

Action 6: To let AG know if more information was required regarding deadline for DMMO applications or DEFRA funding - Completed.

Action 7: RM forwarded minutes from MOD meeting.

All actions from previous meeting closed.

4. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

AG expressed thanks to BD for his dedicated service as Chair of the LAF.

Doug Jones was nominated for Chair by BD and seconded by RJ. The motion was carried unanimously.

Glynn Jones was nominated for Vice-Chair by AS and seconded by RM. The motion was carried unanimously.

5. South Downs National Park general update – Andy Gattiker

AG - Since our last meeting in January, the LAF has been operating at a reduced level of activity. We are committed to revitalising the LAF to make a tangible impact on the ground. To this end, we have recently recruited a new Rights of Way and Access Officer. This is a two-year fixed-term position, and the successful candidate is expected to commence their role within the next two to three weeks. A key responsibility of this new role will be to provide oversight and support for the LAF. The Officer will also actively engage with Rights of Way issues and monitor developments from relevant Highway Authorities.

NJ expressed gratitude to AG for all their hard work on the LAF. The funding for the new Officer's position is a combination of funds from Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and previously reserved funds. The objective is to utilise this two-year period to demonstrate the value of the role and build a strong case for its continued funding beyond the initial term.

AG – There have been some leadership changes within the SDNPA. Siôn McGeever, appointed as the new SDNPA CEO from DEFRA, will assume office in late November. Laura Sercombe has been appointed Director of Landscape and Strategy.

There are also some funding updates:

- SDW/NT partnership work continues with funding from Natural England.
- DEFRA accessibility funding is in its final year, but potential for continued support is being explored. Funding received in years 1 and 3 funded projects like the Centurion Way and accessibility improvements.
- Current projects include accessibility work with RSPB at Pulborough Brooks and

provision of adaptive equipment.

Efforts are underway to secure future accessibility funding.

AG highlighted concerns regarding short deadlines regarding government funding, limiting the opportunity for meaningful input from forums like the LAF in how the funds are allocated and spent. This requirement for rapid response can hinder the development and consideration of innovative and community-led projects. The LAF's input is crucial in determining how future funding, including any potential continuation of accessibility funding, is effectively used within the South Downs National Park.

We also have also received funding from Active Travel England. This one-year revenue funding will be used to:

- Partly supports the new ROW and Access Officer position.
- Focus on improving the National Park's ability to collaborate with other authorities on walking and cycling schemes.
- Adapt the concept of 'active travel' to the unique context of the National Park, considering both utility and leisure journeys.
- Work with other National Parks to develop rural design guidelines for active travel schemes.

RJ – The term active travel has been broadened to include public transport.

AG – Yes, the integration of public transport and other modes of getting about is very welcome. We are unsure whether the funding will continue next year but we are pressing hard for it to continue, so that we can continue the work on ensuring that the active travel is relevant to the national parks.

TB represents the National Park on Transport for the Southeast. They noted that a recent paper on active travel by Transport for the Southeast failed to include the South Downs Way. TB emphasised the need for Transport for the Southeast to tailor their active travel strategies to the specific needs and characteristics of protected landscapes like the South Downs National Park.

AG – We are now using Ark Speed to record all access and ROW work across the park. This system will allow the National Park to provide the LAF with clear data on the volume of work undertaken on access land, the SDW, and other projects. Ark Speed will also enable the National Park to track and report on the number of outstanding access-related issues.

DJ expressed gratitude to BD and AG for their past and ongoing contributions to the LAF. DJ emphasised the value of receiving similar updates from County Councils, particularly regarding their planned schemes for future funding. DJ cautioned against solely relying on the SDNPA for developing ROW improvement schemes, suggesting that other authorities should be encouraged to develop proposals for ROW and access projects within the National Park.

DJ inquired about the statutory requirement for producing an annual report.

AG confirmed that the LAF did not produce an annual report last year, but noted that Natural England did not request it either. AG observed that most other LAFs they have spoken with also did not receive such a request from Natural England.

6. South Downs Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Including review of East Hants LCWIP – Andy Gattiker

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) have been developed by many districts to prioritize walking and cycling investments. Active Travel England was established to oversee and encourage active travel initiatives. Last year National Park Authorities received funding to develop their own LCWIPs. The current LCWIPs are urban focused, our approach aims to address these limitations and improve connectivity between urban and rural areas. The SDNPA will collaborate with Active Travel England and Highways Authorities on this ambitious project. The overarching LCWIP will need to align with the Park Management Plan (PMP) and Local Plan. At the next LAF meeting it would be good to consider any missing gaps. A lot of the existing LCWIP's are currently being reviewed. The current consultation on the East Hampshire District LCWIP ends on 18th November 2024.

BD suggested reviewing the New Forest National Park's LCWIP as a potential reference point.

DJ requested that BD compare the East Hampshire District Council (EHCC) LCWIP with the New Forest LCWIP.

TB offered to share relevant information from Southeast travel for context.

DJ questioned the level of collaboration between EHCC and the SDNPA in developing the EHCC LCWIP, noting the lack of SDNP mention beyond the introduction.

RM observed that only the Petersfield area within the SDNP is significantly included in the EHCC LCWIP.

CF recalled that the EHCC LCWIP primarily focused on reducing car usage.

RM raised concerns about the EHCC LCWIP's potential connections with neighbouring authorities, specifically Chichester District Council.

DJ urged all members to contribute to a collective LAF response to the EHCC LCWIP consultation, given the tight deadline.

Action 1 – AG to circulate East Hampshire District LCWIP online consultation to members of the LAF.

Action 2 – LAF members to agree on how to respond to the consultation via email discussion.

7. Review of South Downs Partnership Management Plan and South Downs Local Plan – Anne Rehill

The PMP is a crucial document that outlines the overarching strategy for managing the South Downs National Park. The PMP sets out how the Authority and its partners will work to secure a positive future for this nationally important landscape, its wildlife and the people who visit it or call it home. The current PMP is undergoing a five-year review which involves extensive engagement with stakeholders. AR encouraged the LAF to participate in the review process by attending engagement sessions, providing feedback on the draft plan, and actively contributing to the implementation of the plan's priorities.

AG – The Local Plan team would like to engage with LAF at the beginning of next year. The draft policies need to be signed off and will be going out to consultation January – March 2025.

AS – The local plan policies are to be agreed in the next couple of weeks.

RW – As a farmer our long-term prospects have been hit hard by inheritance tax increase by government.

AR – That would be expected to come up in discussion and we want the voice of farmers and landowners involved.

LS – PMP is the most important piece of work this year. We need to focus on less but deeper work. The PMP relies massively on partners. If LAF can keep PMP central to insure next 5 years are the best.

DJ – Enquired if the steering group will include ROW officers from other authorities.

AR – No. We are going to confine it to County Councils otherwise the group would become too big. The steering group should be small and focused to deliver. The delivery group will be broader, and we are planning on having a meeting after 1 year to check in on delivery.

LS – Having one person to report back has a greater impact and the group needs to be focused on the PMP.

AR – The County Councils will be involved with the PMP steering group.

RJ – Please can you involve Brighton & Hove City Council in the steering group.

DJ – The potential development sites from the Local Plan will be in the public domain soon and these are a great way to link up, create, and enhance ROWs. How do we influence developers to include ROW in their plans?

AG – We need to be proactive and become involved earlier in the process.

TB – CIL funding is available for improving ROW. BNG sites are often offsite but the money and mechanism to utilise funding from planning sites for access is there.

DJ – If the access and ROW requirements are written into the site allocation policies within the Local Plan this will help ensure that these are provided. We need to engage with communities to get them thinking about ROW and consider these where sites are concerned.

NJ – Is this for policies or for sites? When LAF is consulted on the Local Plan it may be worth putting forward some wording to make sure somewhere in the policies it is included to look at connectivity of ROWs.

DJ – I suggest that someone reports back from the planning committee meeting where the policies will be agreed.

TB – I am happy to report back after the meeting. There are other opportunities through levies that developers pay for ROW.

LS – Thank you TB as this is not a meeting we would attend.

DJ volunteered to attend the PMP steering group as part of his role as Chair of LAF. Unanimous vote, motion carried.

Action 3 – AG to share AR presentation with the members of the LAF.

8. Review of Hampshire Countryside Access Plan – Abby Sullivan (HCC)

Abby Sullivan from Hampshire County Council (HCC) presented on their plans to refresh the Countryside Access Plan. Recognising the continued value of the existing plan, HCC have focused on a refresh through collaboration with internal and external partners.

Four key areas of focus include:

- Planning & Transport: Integrating access considerations into development planning, improving network connectivity, and addressing resident needs.
- Health & Wellbeing: Supporting public health initiatives and promoting access for all.
- Accessibility: Expanding the focus beyond physical accessibility to include mental, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers.
- Climate Change: Balancing access with nature recovery and climate resilience, prioritizing environmental considerations.

Funding will be secured through HCC revenue, external partnerships, and volunteering.

The plan's three delivery areas are:

1. Develop a strategic approach to network management.
2. Work alongside other organisations.
3. Listening, informing, and education.

The plan is currently being finalised and will undergo public consultation in early 2025 with anticipated adoption mid-late 2025.

DJ – Thanked Abs for attending the meeting and updating the LAF on the review of the Countryside Access Plan. DJ stated that it is good to engage with the planning system as early as possible to get them thinking about access, also noted that the 'health and wellbeing' and 'access for all' areas of the plan fit well with the SDNPA aims.

AbS – We will be talking and engaging with other authorities including the National Parks to align with their priorities and ethos.

BD – Is there any sense that the National Parks are highlighted in the plan?

AbS – Yes, both the South Downs and New Forest are included.

TB – Does the access plan cover byways? We come under pressure about byways, and we do support the work of HCC Highways.

AbS – Byways are mentioned, and I have tweaked the wording on them. HCC will be looking at our policies around byways.

RJ – Regarding 'access for all' and 'carbon neutrality', you have 2 big cities with your area. Is there any mention of public transport or any plans for improvement?

AbS - QECP has great facilities with toilets, carpark, café etc, however, the park is hard to reach via public transport, we do recognise this is an issue. We have worked with the transport team, and will be looking at connecting all key destinations across the county, but this will be limited by available funding and staff.

RM – There is the issue of a fragmented network of ROW. Are you actively looking at joining any up?

AbS – Yes, this is in the plan. There is an action to look at ROW and road safety. Whether this is changed by landowner and development via planning or through more engagement.

RW – Do you have a team out clearing footpaths and repairing gates etc?

AbS – We have rangers out on the network, but these are less than before. We do have community engagement rangers and volunteers all helping to keep our ROW looked after. If any landowners need assistance with looking after ROW on their land, they can contact HCC, and we may be able to help source some funding.

Action 4 – AbS to email presentation and draft CAP to AG.

9. AOB

Public Transport

RJ- Informed the LAF that in November 2024, the government announced £1 billion investment in bus services across England for the 2025-26 financial year, but felt that this was not sufficient to maintain work achieved so far. RJ raised concern that smaller bus services would be vulnerable such as the BHCC route to Devil's Dyke which is popular in the summer months but the complete opposite in winter. BHCC have said that journeys for educational purposes are priority if there is not sufficient funding. RJ raised that all local authorities have spending pressures.

CF – Does the PMP include transport? Were the SDNPA consulted on the proposal to remove bus services in country villages

DJ – I expect the SDNPA were aware of the consultation. The LAF responded to the consultation but not sure in the SDNP responded. LAF does include transport but would need to check if it is included in SDNP.

AG – We can check to see if SDNPA did respond to the consultation. We cannot do everything as we are not a transport authority. There are priorities and it is up to you as LAF to challenge that.

DJ – It would be worth trying to encourage District Councils to keep public transport within the SDNP.

RJ – The threat may put them off cutting services within the SDNP.

DJ – We could enquire with transport colleagues what their response would be.

RJ – The LAF can express grave concern for imminent threat to transport to Ditchling Beacon and Devil's Dyke to enjoy the SDW as the funding is uncertain.

LS – This is a great example of conversations that can be taken to PMP. We want to use really live examples like that.

DJ – Are you suggesting RJ that we as a LAF write to BHCC?

RJ – Yes, and to encourage stakeholders for any engagement and potential funding to try and help save the services.

RM – The Number 54 between Petersfield and Chichester is another example of funding cuts as the bus now stops in South Harting so has effectively cut off two towns. If you fragment a route too much it becomes less used, and this becomes a vicious circle.

DJ – We can send an immediate letter to BHCC, but I also think we should meet with transport teams from so we can highlight how the National Park is different to the rest of their counties.

TB – It is about access to access. We can legitimately involve ourselves in this debate.

DJ – If people cannot reach the South Downs, then everyone loses out.

Crow and Glover Reviews

AG – There are no updates regarding either of these reviews.

10. Matters for the next meeting and LAF working groups

- It would be good to consider any missing gaps in the LAF.
- Any new consultations should tease out items for further meetings.

II. Date of next meeting

The new Rights of Way and Access Officer will be setting dates for LAF meetings in 2025 and developing a work plan with speakers as part of their role.