

The Surrey Countryside Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum held at Consort House, Redhill Monday, 29 April 2019

Present:

Members and their Primary Interest:

Ian Russell (Chairman)	Motor Vehicles
Rosie Norris	Mobility vehicles
Avril Sleeman	Equestrian
David Bellchamber	Walking
John Barber	Motor cycling
Pamela Lyman	Land management
Sandra Nichols	Farming
Elliot Cairnes	Walking
Andrew Povey	Local Government
Thor Simpson	Walking
John Whitaker	Carriage driving
Gail Brownrigg	Carriage driving

Officers:

Steve Mitchell	Countryside Access and Operations Team Manager
Joanne Porter	Countryside Access Assistant

Observers:

Romy Jackson	National Farmers Union
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1 Declarations of interest

- 1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2 Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Richard Billington (local government), Lisa Creaye-Griffin (Countryside Group Manager)

3 Minutes of previous meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 Matters arising/action points

- 4.1 Joanne was not able to receive Sarah-Jane Chimbwandira's presentation by email as it was too big. Joanne or Ian could try to get to members by a

different method if required. Members decided that they were OK not to receive it.

- 4.2 Ian went to meet Hugh Broom on his farm (Sonds Place Farm) between Westcott and Dorking and had an interesting visit looking at all the rights of way on the farm and how access is managed. Hugh Broom has managed to separate the rights of way from the working farm by diverting a footpath away from his farmyard and then upgrading it to bridleway. Ian asked if the members would like him to come to the SCAF to talk about the issues he has faced.

Action Ian to ask Hugh Broom if he would like to give a talk to the Surrey Countryside Access Forum at a future meeting.

- 4.3 Ian asked if there were any volunteers willing to be nominated as vice-chair. There were no volunteers so the SCAF will carry on without a vice-chair for the time-being.
- 4.4 Ian attended the MoD Liaison group meeting and reported that there has been a complaint about gates to the fenced off areas of MoD being kept locked when there is no training going on, which is when they are supposed to be open. A cycling group called TAG (Trail Action Group) has written to the Secretary of State for defence about the issue. There is also seems to be a problem with other groups using the areas not re-opening the gates after use. The MoD has investigated and found that this is generally not the case. However, training areas can be booked out by MOD units for whole days or nights and may not use it for the entire time. The MOD will continue to ensure that gates are kept open when there is no training booked.
- 4.5 Ian also reported that the MoD is rewriting the byelaws and the group received a presentation from the company that is writing them. The new byelaws will be very similar to before and will be consulted on once they have been written. Cyclists have no right of access at the moment under the current byelaws but have been allowed access. Ian said that unfortunately some cyclists feel that they have a total right to access the areas and some have been cutting locks on gates and causing other damage. This could have a negative impact on all users as it could make the MoD less willing to allow access.
- 4.6 The MoD are also looking at opening up new bridleway access. Avril said that Sandra Smith from the British Horse Society has been working on this with the MoD.
- 4.7 Ian said that there is a question about a circular route that would involve the Basingstoke Canal towpath. It appears that there is no right for horses to access the towpath, but cyclists are permitted, although they don't have a right. Gail said that the towpath needs to be dedicated or a permissive route created.
- 4.8 Gail suggested creating a parallel /adjacent route for horse riders along the canal next to the towpath.

Action – Avril to contact Sandra Smith and find out how far planning for the Pirbright circular route has got and the status of the towpath.

- 4.9 There was a workshop for the Guildford Greenway last Friday to discuss a potential cycle route between Guildford and Godalming. There is money for a feasibility study, and they are looking at potential routes. It is still in the early stages and it will be consulted on when ready.
- 4.10 Ian and Gail attended the Surrey Hills Byways Working Group. Gail said that Countrywatch is looking to restart itself. Gail suggested getting a police officer from Countrywatch to a SCAF meeting.
- 4.11 Gail said that the Mole Valley Rural Crime Engagement Meeting is being held on 8th May. Gail is attending and members suggested topics such as flytipping, illegal access, poaching, aggressive dogs, arson, illegal / antisocial off road driving and mountain biking, and metal detectorists for her to raise.
- 4.12 Ian said that the police are taking illegal access seriously. They have three scramble bikes, but they are not being used at the moment. John said that the police are holding an event in May at three sites to raise awareness of the law in relation to the use of byways, and to let users know that the police are watching out for illegal use.
- 4.13 John said that he is a member of the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF) and it promotes the legal use of byways by motor cycles, and it has a Code of Conduct for members to follow.

Action – Gail to draft a letter to the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner to support the use of the scramble bikes to deter illegal use of byways and associated trespass.

Action – Invite Hollie Iribar, Surrey Police's wildlife and rural coordinator to a SCAF meeting

Action – John said he will contact the TRF and ask them to support the letter to the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner.

4.14 Joanne sent the letter that Avril drafted for the Secretary State for Environment regarding the 2026 cut-off.

4.15 Ian apologised for changing the wording of the letter which inadvertently changed the meaning of one of the sentences.

4.16 Andrew suggested sending a copy of the letter to all county councillors. Mike Goodman who is the Cabinet member for Environment meets Michael Gove who is the Secretary of State regularly. Andrew also suggested sending a copy to the chief executive of all the districts and boroughs in Surrey and all the Surrey MPs.

Action – Joanne to send a copy of the letter around to the people suggested above.

Action – Joanne to see if the letter can be uploaded to Huddle so members of other LAF's nationally can see a copy.

4.17 Gail suggested sending some more details about the SCAF around with the letter to raise the profile

- 4.18 John W suggested raising the cut-off at a national level such as the LAF Conference.
- 4.19 Sandra asked about the process of claiming routes. Steve said that an application for a route can be made on documentary evidence, but it does need to be investigated, and the application can be objected to and end up at a Public Inquiry. There is a waiting list for applications and the countryside access team is currently confirming one or two a year. Each claim can take up to 3 years to investigate.
- 4.20 Pamela asked about the list of 91 gaps in the Rights of Way network in Surrey that Avril and other members of the SCAF identified several years ago. Pamela is concerned that the list could lead to extra liability for landowners where the suggested gaps are.
- 4.21 Steve said that the regulations for the 2026 cut-off have not actually come out yet, so no-one really knows the details.

5 Matters dealt with since the previous meeting

- 5.1 The forum sent a letter to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding the 2026 cut-off for claiming rights of way.

6 Rights of Way Definitive Map training session

- 6.1 This item has been deferred to a subsequent meeting as Dan Williams was unable to attend the meeting.

7 Surrey County Council Countryside Estate Strategy

- 7.1 Pamela attended two workshops relating to the Countryside Estate Strategy
- 7.2 Pamela felt that the Sandford Principle wasn't being applied fully when the options for the Countryside Estate were being considered.
- 7.3 Pamela felt it was inappropriate to ask user groups how the countryside could be developed, and that some of the suggestions were very inappropriate.
- 7.4 She disagreed with suggestions that loss of biodiversity on the countryside estate caused by increasing public access could be offset on private land through the Surrey Nature Partnership's Natural Capital approach.
- 7.5 Pamela felt that increasing public access could lead to increased fires, the spread of disease and have a negative impact on neighbours and neighbouring communities.
- 7.6 Pamela felt that Surrey County Council was just trying to make money out of the Countryside Estate.
- 7.7 Ian explained the background to the consultation and workshops and the fact that the Countryside Estate does need to be self-funding due to the budget cuts.

- 7.8 Ian said that the Sandford Principle applies only if there is a conflict between development and protection, in which case protecting the flora and fauna should take priority. (It states: "Where irreconcilable conflicts exist between conservation and public enjoyment, then conservation interest should take priority.")
- 7.9 Steve said that the Countryside Estate is a large amount of land, and that there is no revenue funding for the Countryside Estate in the next financial year, so it does need to be self-funding. The county council gave the SWT £1.2 million a year at the beginning of the contract and next year it will be £0.
- 7.10 The county council and SWT are looking at income from properties etc. as a way to plug the gap.
- 7.11 The workshop was a way of asking users to suggest ways to make the countryside estate self-sufficient.
- 7.12 Avril said that the impact of Foot and Mouth disease made Surrey County Council realise how important access to the countryside and tourism is to the local economy and what an asset the Countryside Estate is.
- 7.13 The impact of increased visitors on the countryside has been recognised through schemes such as that associated with the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) where new green space has to be created as part of a development to protect sites that are part of the SPA.
- 7.14 Avril said that if there is no money, then it needs to be raised to maintain the countryside in some way.
- 7.15 Avril also said that the increase in visitors to the Surrey Hills has had a negative impact on other users and causes damage to sites.
- 7.16 The Natural Capital Investment Plan that is being operated by the Surrey Nature Partnership is looking to raise money from developments and mineral exploration that could be controversial.
- 7.17 Andrew said that it is not surprising given the county council's financial position that the countryside estate should have to pave its way, and it is reasonable to include introducing car parking charges as part of this.
- 7.18 Steve said that the strategy is in a rough draft at the moment, and that it should go to cabinet in June.

8 Surrey County Council update

- 8.1 Steve said that the county council is undergoing another restructure into a commissioning and delivery structure.
- 8.2 The Environment Service had a new structure in place on 1 April. Countryside and Waste has been combined and Steve now reports to Richard Parkinson who was previously Head of Waste.
- 8.3 The next phase is to see what parts of the service fits into a delivery role, and what part fits into a commissioning role.

8.4 Lisa's role doesn't exist anymore, but she will be working with countryside until the summer.

Action – Invite Richard Parkinson to the October SCAF meeting.

9 Forward Plan

9.1 The forward plan was discussed to bring it up to date.

Action – Joanne to find the draft letter that Kieran wrote to send to the Planning Officers and send to Ian

Action – Joanne to find out how to get an item about SCAF into Surrey Matters

Action – David to put together proposals for the SCAF Facebook page.

Action – Joanne to ask Kieran Foster if he knows of anyone who would be a suitable cycling representative on SCAF. Also enquire with Rob Fairbanks if he would recommend anyone from the Surrey Hills cycling working group.

9.2 Gail suggested that the Surrey Hills Equestrian Group's recommended rides may be suitable for disability access / mobility vehicles.

Action – Rosie to look at the Surrey Hills website to see if any routes could be suitable for mobility vehicles.

9.3 Elliot suggested that the Ramblers could provide more accessible gates for their sponsored gates.

9.4 Steve suggested that Rosie look at the Easy Access routes on the Surrey County Council website.

Action – Steve to give a presentation about the ROWIP at the next meeting which will help with the horse-riding item on the forward plan.

Action – Start next meeting with the forward plan in order to complete the discussions.

10 Outstanding Consultations

10.1 Details of outstanding consultations were noted

11 Any other urgent business/public questions

11.1 There was no urgent business or questions.

12 Date of Next Meeting

12.1 It was confirmed that the next meeting will be held on:

- 1.30pm Monday 15 July 2019
Room 6, Millmead, Guildford