

The Surrey Countryside Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey Countryside Access Forum Surrey Hills AONB Office, Warren Farm Barns, Mickleham Monday, 17 July 2023

Present:

Members (and their primary interests):

- Elliot Cairnes, Chairman (Walking)
- John Barber (Motorcycles)
- Ian Wilks (Walking)
- Avril Sleeman (Equestrian)
- Paul Marshall (Mountain Biking)
- Gail Brownrigg (Carriage driving)
- Pamela Lyman (Landowner)
- Sophie Gordon (Cyclists)
- Thor Simpson (Walking)
- Corinna Osborne-Patterson (Landowner)
- Vicky Keller (Walking)

Officers:

- Jonathan Wall, Countryside Access Assistant Legal Definition
- James Emmett, Countryside Access Officer (East) Maintenance and Enforcement
- Jenna Emmerton - Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Guests:

- Yasmin Broome, Surrey Coalition for Disabled People
- Matt Sewell, Surrey Police

1. Declarations of Interest

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Apologies

2.1 Gareth Jex (Motor Vehicles), Neil Baker (Commons), Pat Lewis (Walking), Penny Carey (Equestrian), Kathleen McMillan (MoD)

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2022 were confirmed with amendment to include Vicky Keller.

4. Matters arising / Action points

4.1 Avril raised North Park Farm Quarry – noted to the forum that discussions were ongoing with Anne Woods.

4.2 Pamela raised the annual cut schedule. James explained the cut schedule and priority system – paths listed P1 are subject to heavy public use and near major amenities (School access, for example) and get 2 cuts per year. Other paths are

listed as priority 2 and these will receive 1 cut each year. Further information about annual cuts are available on the SCC website and paths can be submitted for the cut list if there is sufficient usage to allocate resources. Noted that vegetation growing either side of the path is landowner responsibility.

4.3 Noted that path wardens have a role in helping identify these.

5. Matters dealt with since the previous meeting

5.1 There were no matters dealt with since the last meeting.

6. Ongoing Matters

6.1 Liaison and matter of MoD access land, discussed at LAF joint chair meeting, minutes available.

6.2 Junction 10 update. Liaison between Highways and SCC mentioned regarding status of Ockham, stub roundabout and RHS garden. SCAF letter has been sent.

6.3 Wisley new town application has been rejected by Guildford Borough Council.

7. Surrey Police

7.1 Matt Sewell from Surrey Police (SPCC) kindly joined the forum to discuss rural policing issues with members.

7.2 Issue of 4x4s and trailbikes illegally accessing Rights of Way was discussed. Surrey Police undertaking outreach to Byways working group to help tackle this issue. Highlighted that there can be an issue with walkers not always understanding the status of byways. The latest statistics on crime not available – Matt pointed out that statistics are reliant on reporting from members of the public to be effective, so police can target their resources more effectively.

7.3 Matt said that rural crime can be broken down into main categories: equine, heritage, agricultural, wildlife. Noted that civil issues (i.e., trespass) are not actionable by the police unless a criminal offence has been committed.

7.4 Fly tipping raised – if seen in action, then this is a police matter. If already occurred, this should be referred to the borough/district council. For rivers this should be referred to the Environment Agency.

7.5 Noted that security cameras are being installed on Ranmore Common.

7.6 Ian asked about community link with the police and possible role for path wardens. Matt responded that SPCC do have community officers who interface with groups like SCAF. They get 500 999 calls a day, so decision has to be made to prioritise resources.

7.7 Question raised about dangerous dog attacks. Matt responds that if there is evidence of criminality then Police will follow up.

7.8 Pamela mentions poaching – this comes under theft law. Matt encourages people to report these issues as Police rely on positive identification to bring charges.

7.9 Elliot raises wildfires and questions whether arson has been to blame. Matt is not aware of any particular cases. SPCC have done some work with Surrey Fire and Rescue to spread awareness on fire prevention. Yasmin mentions limiting the sales of disposable barbeques which are responsible for many fires, and that this should be enforced nationally.

8 Access for Disabled users of the network.

8.1 Yasmin Broome was introduced to the forum; she represents the Surrey Coalition for Disabled People. This is a user led organisation that empowers disabled people to be active by working within the community and Surrey Hills AONB, promoting diversity, equality and inclusion.

8.2 Yasmin gave a presentation to help SCAF members understand the issues that disabled users face, and the methods by which they can be tackled. This does not only include visible physical disabilities, but also those who are hard of hearing, have impaired vision, or long-term neurological conditions.

8.3 Yasmin explained the typical barriers to the countryside that disabled users face. Broke this down into **Facilities** – refreshments, handwashing, seating, toilets; **Terrain** – camber, gradients, material and availability of accessible paths; **Technology** – Mobile phone signal, defibrillators; **Public Transport** – or a lack of it, due to a risk of being stranded.

8.4 Yasmin suggested measures to address the above. Countryside ‘buddies’, to assist people, more boardwalks and accessible gates. Accessible information is also required – for example, wheelchair charging points, free washing for wheels, trampers, velocipedes and other mobility aids available for use.

8.5 Sophie asked about a list of useful information – Yasmin advised Surrey Coalition has a website with further information.

8.6 Gail suggested that public transport can liaise with other groups who have a wider interest than disabled people, such as those who wish to access the countryside but don't have access to private vehicles. Elliot raises the Rail2Ramble scheme as a potential avenue to assist with this.

8.7 Regarding on site information, Elliot brings attention to QR codes at sites with further information and support. Avril says that this does not help people without access to smartphones. Rob responds that most people do have smartphones, so having QR codes is broadly helpful to a large number of people, and that also information is provided separately online such as on the AONB website.

8.8 Yasmin and AONB are working with £200k DEFRA funding to identify key sites and improvements for disabled access. Avril points out that issues also affect partially abled, such as stiles and gates wide enough for trampers. Response that AONB and SCDP looking at auditing suitable routes for disabled users.

9 AONB – Surrey Hills Update

10.1 2 working parties currently looking at AONB improvements – these will defer feedback into October.

10.2 Jenna discussed the access funding received from DEFRA (214k) to be spent on main locations such as Newlands Corner and Box Hill, in consultation with SCDP.

Funding was received quite late so funding was directed to key sites to ensure money could be spent successfully.

- 10.3 Jenna also mentioned Farming in Protected landscape, a funding initiative run with the AONB team, with the aim to support farmers with four main objectives of Nature, Climate, People and Place.
- 10.4 Accessibility and agriculture can clash – position of Countryside access is to minimise the number of gates and stiles to improve accessibility, but farmers understandably want to ensure livestock is not affected. Potential for self-closing gates or larger accessibility gates.
- 10.5 Avril enquired about BOATS (Byways Open to all Traffic) and Traffic Restriction Orders (TROs) in place – makes the point that accessing byways in vehicles can be a good way for disabled users to see the countryside and TRO's can sometimes detract from that.
- 10.6 Opportunity for AONB to apply for another £100k or funding, not yet informed if successful – potential to target more improvements at other sites not included in the first round.

11. ROWIP

- 11.1 SCAF looking to contribute towards ROWIP, potentially form subgroup to respond or interim meeting.
- 11.2 Jonathan affirms that ROWIP has not yet begun. Sharon Bayne will contact SCAF when consultation period is underway.

12. Wey and Arun Canal Trust (WACT)

- 12.1 SCAF's WACT subgroup attended a site meeting with Tony Ford to discuss proposals for restoration of the Canal. Visited several key sites where there was potential impact on the RoW network.
- 12.2 Works at Rooks Hill and Fanesbridge – potential clash between vehicles accessing for works and RoW users.
- 12.3 SCAF to send letter raising proposals. Permissive footpath to be dedicated, SCAF wants dedicated circular walk.
- 12.4 Ian raises issue of hydrology and stagnant water.

13. Forward plan

- 13.1 Forward plan discussed.

14 Outstanding consultations

- 14.1 Outstanding consultations were noted.

15 Any other business/ urgent questions

- 15.1 Lost historic ways – list to be taken to next meeting.

Action: Circulate information on gaps and historic ways to SCAF and other interest groups.

15.2 Dunsfold development noted.

15.3 Question from observing members of the public. Problem with development on Footpath 113 Farnham, with proposed development on a site that would impact usage of the lane on which the footpath is carried along. Requested SCAF to investigate and potentially object. Advised that if planning permission is approved and there is a private right then there may be limited scope on which to act. Ian and others to liaise further and offer advice.

The date for the subsequent meeting is as follows:

- Monday 16th October 2023 1:30pm

Merrow Depot, Wey and Bourne rooms