

Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum Meeting – Minutes 01/05/2025

Attendees:

Luke Burstow (LB) *Chair*

Liz Symes (LS)

Pete Hodd (PH)

David Taylor (DT)

Chantelle Hoppé (CH) – BHCC Rights of Way Officer (*minutes*)

Apologies:

Dave Brookshaw (DB)

Andrew Coleman (AC)

Ali Polawski (AP)

John Funnell (JF)

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Minutes agreed. Actions update:

- **LB to write a letter to the council as a statutory advisory body – asking to retain local powers and budget for PRow rather than being subsumed into county level with devolution.**

2. Discussion Items (Standing items)

City Downland Estate Plan (CDEP):

A meeting was held by officers in advance of the next CDEP stakeholder group meeting (17/04/25).

The main items discussed:

- Estates will provide a briefing to the stakeholder group on the situation at the South Down Riding School – for discussion. As it stands the parcel of land does not seem marketable to tenants. Choices for discussion: change access arrangements, change lease terms, manage the land in-house (part of the Ranger grazing scheme)
- Easthill farm the lease has been granted to Plumpton
- Home Farm (Stanmer lease) is up for discussion. (LB) does this mean the tenancy is up for renewal? (DT) It is likely the tenancy is up for renewal – the discussion is whether to renew or re-tender
- They have the go-ahead to get a secondment in to replace James Woodward and support Jessica with the CDEP

- Estates Management Company (currently Savills) is out for tender. (DT) Received a letter this morning informing tenant farmers that Knight Frank had won the tender. This is a shame as they will take over on 1st July and all continuity will be lost – all the relationship building with Savills. (LB) Yes loss of continuity is a real shame – especial with all the CDEP work.
- Rangers – Will Furze was successful in his application to continue as interim Ranger Team Leader for another year / until the department restructure is finalised (we now have a new head of City Parks and Leisure in post – Mike Harris)
- Will is currently retendering for the grazier of the countryside stewardship scheme (conservation grazing around the urban fringe).
- Public Health – revamping health walks with a new volunteer drive – focus on some new areas for walks in the Downland estate. There will be a publicity campaign around this. (PH) is aware anecdotally that a lot of volunteers were lost through Covid and have been lost recently due to the heavy admin load put on leaders. From the Ramblers perspective, asking leaders to fill out Risk Assessment forms puts some people off (especially if they know they can make £5 pp on leading a walk privately). Healthwalks asks for 2 volunteers per walk – this will also limit the number of walks going out. (LB) Certainly does seem to be a push for volunteering from the council – but there is a limit to what you can expect volunteers to do in their free time. (CH) will forward this feedback to the Leisure Team.
- Stanmer – funding bids in with Historic England – Welly Boot Library at Stanmer and improvements to access the park at Coldean and Moulsecombe. (LB) Welcomed the idea of a Welly Boot Library at Stanmer – this is a great idea.

Transport Partnership

(PH) Valley Gardens project – lots of communications at the moment about how access will be maintained. It is not ideal and a nuisance for drivers. Compounded by the Royal Albion hotel subsidence – causing road closures. The seafront was shut for a one day conference with government representatives – made a long wish list - not sure what will come of it.

University access to E-Bikes

(LB) Preston Park – new cycle / pedestrian facilities are good. (PH) The bottom of Stanford Avenue is a great improvement. Further north the cycle lane will be a compromise – either in the bus lane or taking up road space – neither ideal.

3. Reports

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

- Accessibility: surface improvements at Bevendean Down BW B47, (CH) attending training course at Aston Rowant – Natural England Accessibility flagship site
- Improving Connectivity: BHCC highways team will attending the next LAF meeting to consult on the new Local Transport Plan 5
- Improving access to the Downs: £181k of SDNPA CIL – looking into improving crossings and bus set down points along Ditchling Road north
- Missing Links: Longridge Avenue DMMO progressing

Maintenance & Management

Gate Repairs	0
Gate Replacements	1
Stile Replacement / Repair	0
Waymark installation	1
Vegetation Clearance (from public requests)	3
Surface Improvements	2

- Surfacing works at the entrance to BW B47 at Bevendean Down – entrance to the Downs and the community garden
- Drainage works at Saltdean Vale. (DB) sent in photos after the recent rains. Water is still pooling at the bottom of the hill and the grip overwhelmed. (PH) went to take a look and the water had cleared. (CH) We followed advice from the Highways Flood Engineer – to try and divert water away from BW B4 before it gets there. Perhaps we need to install more grips further up the hill to divert more water before it gets to the drain. (DT) Agreed – this is their experience on the farm – a series of grips helps. (CH) A full reconstruction of the track BW B4 with proper drainage is really needed – but PRow does not have the budget to remake what is essentially a road. Will keep monitoring Planning for any local developments that could help fund.
- Continuing to install metal fingerposts where PRow leave the road, as and when the wooden ones rot out.
- Benfield Cycle Path has been cleared
- West Hove Golf club have reinstated RB H11 after recent fencing work encroached on the path – an area which is already a pinch point. The club have agreed to carry on maintaining this strip of path.
- Site lines at Race hill / Wildon Avenue have been improved with the removal of vehicles and fly tipping. (PH) trailers have found a way onto the layby at the southern end – not affecting site lines as yet. Perhaps better protection near the gate would be helpful? (LB) or a PSPO as they have with Stanmer Park.
- Balsdean – the farmer put chalk on the path a few years back. We have received complaints that its slippery from equestrians recently. (CH) undertook a site visit and identified 3 areas that were particularly slippery – the worst being near the open access land (the rest is mostly greening up now and grassing over). We are currently trying to get the farmer to apply a stone layer to the problem areas. (LB) Can this be taken further legally if they don't comply. (CH) We don't really want to be prosecuting our own tenant farmers. The best course of action would be to get the remedial works done and charge it back to the farmer.
- We have been allocated £50k of LTP funding for surfacing works if anyone has any ideas they want to put forward

Actions:

- ***(CH) Saltdean Vale – look into additional grips to take water off the bridleway further up the slope***
- ***CH up date on the Balsdean farm track issue***
- ***Please give CH any surfacing works ideas. CH will come up with some options for the next meeting***

Legal Rights of Way Work

- Benfield Valley new foot paths have now been opened up and are in use.
- Longridge Avenue – the notice period came to an end on 6th March. The objections were confirmed by the landowners. A pack is being made ready to send to the Planning Inspectorate for adjudication – hopefully decided on written representations or a hearing (meeting) rather than a full enquiry (as there are no users to cross examine – all based on historic evidence).
- Planning – the application for new houses at Benfield valley includes allocation of open access land to the south of Hangleton Lane. (LB) heard there was a covenant on the land prohibiting building work. (DT) You can buy out a covenant – perhaps will go down this route if planning is successful.

Actions:

- ***(CH) Follow up on Longridge Avenue application***

4. Missing Links / Lost Ways / Unrecorded Paths (CH)

Longridge Avenue – as above

5. Any Other Business

(DT) Gate to Newmarket Plantation off the Falmer Road path is in a poor condition – needs replacing

(CH) will put this on the maintenance list to be replaced with a metal gate asap

(LB) Email sent to the group about volunteer opportunities on the Seafront Development Board. This seemed relevant given recent LAF discussions. (LS) did look into this, but they had a list of criteria they were after and (LS) did not feel like a good fit. (LB) That's a shame but thank you for looking into it.

(LB) The council's plans to increase events on public space – this is a privatisation of public green and blue spaces. It's not only the time of the event where the space is closed off – it's the set up and take down periods as well – it can be weeks / months with the festival. As a group that advocates for access this seems like an issue. This is no doubt being done to increase visitor numbers and spend in the local economy – but at the price of access to open spaces for local residents. (PH) Plus the land takes an age to recover – either a mud bath or a dust bowl.

(PH) Valley gardens is almost completely shut off to the public at the moment for the May festival. Compounded by the fact that the Steine is not accessible due to the road works. Oddly they have not used the hard standing near St Peters Church which was designed for event use (the ground would not be impacted). There is a particularly dangerous spot at the pinch point near what was the Richmond Pub – where there is a road crossing. The fence is encroaching so much it feels like an accident waiting to happen with cyclists, pedestrians and cars in very close proximity. (LB) This will be compounded when events are chucking out and many more people are trying to use the crossing point.

(CH) will pass this feedback on to the Events Team

(CH) Following up on complaints about two access gates from Coldean on to 39 Acres. The banks are so steep – someone broke their shoulder. Looking into installation of steps on health and safety grounds.

(LS) Saltdean – complaint about a kissing gate impeding access to the bridleway out the back of Bishopstone Drive, from a private development. (CH) has been contacted about this. As it is a private gate on private land there isn't a lot BHCC can do about this. Have suggested they contact Planning to see if they are in contravention of their planning permission. Also suggested contacted SDNPA to see if they could exert any pressure on the managing company to make the gate more accessible?

(LS) at Black Rock one of the new lifeguard stations was sited right at the end of the boardwalk – so people using it could only see the station – not the sea. Power of social media – after complaints they have moved it.

Dates of Meeting 2025: (Thursdays 6-8pm)

24th July (in person)

23rd October