

Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum Meeting – Minutes 11-07-24

Attendees:

Luke Burstow (LB) *Chair*

Dave Brookshaw (DB)

Andrew Coleman (AC)

David Taylor (DT)

Ali Polowski (AP)

Liz Symes (LS)

John Funnell (JF) – in part

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

Rob Walker (Head of Cityparks)

James Woodward (City Downland Estate Programme Manager)

Apologies:

Pete Hodd (PH)

1. Welcome & Introductions

Welcome to James Woodward – City Downland Estate Programme Manager

The LAF is probably most familiar with the CDEP (City Downland Estate Plan) through the Farm Plans – which are being initiated / reviewed when farm tenancies come up for renewal. Stakeholders from the Downland Advisory Panel (DB sits on) advise on the Plans which then come back to council officers for comment. Councillors are then asked to sign off on the Farm Plans. A large focus of the plans is improving access. Sites that have come up recently include: Ovingdean Grange Farm, Patcham, Pickershill, Easthill field at Foredown Tower, home farm field Moulsecomb (Task & Finish Groups assigned to the Plans).

Each site is very specific in terms of improving accessibility – more paths / open access / improving infrastructure (surfaces, gates, waymarking). Work closely with the Rights of Way Officer on this

Questions:

(DB) Attended a meeting on Tuesday for the DAP. The start of the DAP was slow going, but with the arrival of James and Cllr Rowkins things seems to be moving more swiftly. There's still lots to do but the Task & Finish Groups are working well.

(LB) There has been a focus from Savills on extracting value from the estate – there can be commercial conflict between improving access and profitability. How can we reconcile the two? (JW) It is council policy that income generated from the estate will be ploughed back into delivering on the CDEP. There is no guarantee going forward due to the financial situation the council is in – but it is policy at the moment.

(LB) Are events in green spaces separate income or does that go back to the Estate? (RW) Income generated goes to fund the outdoor events team. Waterhall income from the clubhouse is invested back into the site.

(LB) Does BHCC have any influence over private landowners adjacent to the estate? (JW) work with Iford estate and the National Trust. Other landowner collaborations through SDNPA.

(DB) At the meeting on Tuesday – discussion over what is going to happen to farmer's income with the push towards regenerative / sustainable farming practices? (DT) Agrees this has costs and the only way to pursue this is with the support of the landowner. For instance, can invest in going into lots of environmental stewardship schemes – these only last 3 years and if the funding is pulled then left without an income stream.

(JW) Heritage Lottery funding was unsuccessful – to make the long barn at Stanmer accessible, and the donkey wheel and a couple of buildings into workshops.

(RW) the parking revenue from Stanmer is invested back into the park making it more financially stable – a lot of that will be used on resurfacing the main track through the park (however, it means it won't be such a financial drain in the future – constantly filling potholes).

(LB) what has happened about the counters on gates issue? (CH) There are a few counters around the area e.g. Falmer Rd path, however, they often go into disrepair and then the data is not reliable (as well as the ongoing maintenance costs). SDNPA are piloting mobile telemetry data as this is much more reliable and more granulated data as you can see where people are coming from / going to, as well as use of paths. (LB) There is a danger of only investing in well used paths – other paths may not be well use because they are in a bad state of repair and need attention. (CH) the data is most valuable for reporting on how improvements made have increased visitor levels – rather than using it to target improvements. (RW) the asset survey that CH is carrying out is more useful for pinpointing where improvements are needed.

(CH) can you tell the group about the plans for Easthill field and Home Farm field – with the dog walking areas? (JW) the idea is to create a dog walking field at the southern end of the Easthill Field. This will be a commercial endeavour (for people with problem dogs / professional dog walkers) – this will help fund the upkeep of the field – creating a perimeter fence for a circular walk as well as the two paths that bisect the field. Field to be fenced as grazing may to introduced to promote wildflowers. (CH) This is a good example of how income generation can go hand in hand with improving access.

(RW) Moulsecomb Home Farm – Cityparks top the field once a year at the moment. It's a great link to Wild Park and Stanmer. (JW) Aspirations to make a surfaced path from the bottom (train station) to link to the Ditchling Rd South cycle path. There is a proposal to graze areas using temporary fencing – like the fencing used at certain times on Marquee Brow – if funding available.

(LB) It is great if places are made more accessible – encouraging people to use the land and improving signage so people know where they can and can't go (this is identified as a barrier)

(JW) Applied for a smaller National Lottery grant for a project with the Trust for Developing Communities – to run events to help marginalised communities access the estate (working with youth clubs, refugee groups and other priority groups) – accessing Stanmer, Hollingbury Hillfort, Chattri (heritage, nature conservation and skills days focus). This funding looks promising.

(LB) If you have a contact at the Trust for Developing Communities could you ask if they have anyone they could put forward to join the LAF? This has been identified as an area for improvement in the group – diversifying membership – to better understand different needs / barriers to access.

(LS) What is going on with the fenced off area of Wild Park? (RW) This is a drainage scheme for the A27 – creating a rain garden / wetland at times in this area of the park. Great for wildlife as well as a drainage strategy. (LS) will there be access paths around it? (CH) yes, paths have been designed in. (RW) This has been carried out on smaller scale around the city to deal with flooding issues. (DB) This helps slow down the water from the winterbourne stream.

(AC) In the Cityplan, land at Ovingdean Grange Farm is designated for housing – who gets to money from this? (JW) this money should go back into the CDEP for delivery.

(LB) What is the CDEP budget? (JW) There is no budget at the moment. There were a couple of disposals at Stanmer but only 20% was invested back into CDEP – the rest went to council deficit.

(DB) Neighbourhood plans are so important for getting a larger share of CIL money.

(DT) The slowness of decision making can be very frustrating. There has been an empty property on the farm for two years. (JW) At the moment tenants have a right to buy after two years – this can complicate things. (RW) If there is disagreement about what to do with assets – this can also cause delays.

(AP) Wants it to be noted that access into horse fields with bridleway gates can be problematic. These animals are beloved pets and do not want anyone to be able to steal them. (CH) There may be instances like this where stiles are more appropriate.

Action – JW to ask the Trust for Developing Communities if they have anyone they could put forward to join the LAF?

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

LAF Members agreed the minutes of the last meeting

3. Discussion Items (Standing items)

Access for All Project (CH) – Since submitting the draft feasibility studies to National Highways they have been in touch to say that there are insufficient funds to pay for construction this financial year. Meanwhile £181,000 of SDNPA CIL money has been allocated to the stretch from High Park Farm (Stanmer) to Ditchling Beacon – priority stretch as it does not exist on the ground. We would need to find match funding in order to go into construction. The next stage would be to find funding for Detailed Design. BHCC Highways are doing this for the project. Once detailed design is complete – with associated costs – can approach ESCC to see if they are willing to adopt (to save on Planning through SDNPA – permitted development), and then look for funding to cover the shortfall in construction costs.

(DB) would it not be possible to use the existing bridleway network to get from Stanmer to Ditchling Beacon. (AC) Often uses the bridleway on the east side of the Ditchling Rd.

(CH) by using the farm track on the west side of the road it prevents people from having to cross the busy Ditchling Road. It is also the most direct route to the Beacon and South Downs Way.

City Downland Estate Plan (CDEP):

See Above

Transport Partnership

Plans for the A23 junction improvements circulated. Comments from the LAF already submitted.

4. Reports

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

Accessibility improvements: new bridleway gate at Warren Rd car park (adjacent to equestrian stile / vehicle barrier); stile removed at Rottingdean Recreation Ground (FP B39)

Estate Farm signage (for PRow and Access Land). The group agreed the wording. (AC) suggested ‘ Take your litter and dog poo home’. (DT) doesn’t think dog poo is such an issue on farms – worse if left in bags. Stick and flick is fine. Neosporosis is an over-rated problem – very unlikely that dogs will spread it as they would have had to eat the placenta of infected animals. (DB) on a recent walk with Ranger Paul Gorringer and Waterhall – the bigger problem of dog poo was the affect on ecology as it over nutrients the ground.

Promoted Bus Routes on the urban fringe – digitised the maps from DB (many thanks). Routes from Mile Oak to Saltdean with varying distances. The group agreed the routes. (LB) would be good to have route descriptions for people with varying physical abilities. Also good for people with Autism – to know what to expect. (LS) Photos of surfaces / obstacles would be good too. (CH) agreed – can use screen grabs from Vaisala recordings.

Improving connectivity to green spaces – The Safer, Better Steets Program are looking at improved crossings / dropped kerbs – have offered to attend a future LAF meeting to discuss their programme

Actions:

DB to send CH the recent Saltdean Walk leaflet – run by the Rangers

CH – progress the promoted routes on council website

CH – invite Safe, Better Streets rep to the next LAF meeting

Maintenance & Management

Gate Repairs	4
Gate Replacements	3
Stile Replacement / Repair	2
Waymark installation	0
Vegetation Clearance (from public requests)	8
Surface Improvements	0
Obstruction*	4

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- Warren Rd Car park – farmer put a pallet in front of the broken equestrian stile as they were broken into. The equestrian stile is being replaced with a vehicle barrier and a bridleway gate – improving access
 - Standean Farm – the field margin was cropped (this has now been cut back by the farmer restoring the 4m width path).
 - BW B68 alongside the A27 at Patcham – the path was churned up by tractors in the winter. The surface has been re-instated. The farmer also cleared the mud from the track at Horsedean.

Surface Improvements - £50k of Local Transport Plan funding to spend

- Option 1: repair potholes caused by tractor damage on key paths: Mile Oak RB P15; Sweet Hill BW B80; Woodingdean Norton Drive BW B21a
- Option 2: create hard surfaced path on new bridleway in Stanmer - grassy links (Marquee brow) and surface the stretch of path from Old Boat Corner to Beech Walk as it gets very churned up in the winter

(LB) Stanmer has designated funds allotted from the parking and funding bids that could pay for surfacing here. Money better spent on paths where there are no other funding sources – option 1 (particularly Sweet Hill as this is a very well used path). (RW) this is true but the funds from parking could get sucked into the myriad of other pressing issues in Stanmer

(LS) Suggested the route from Wilson Avenue east towards the garden centre BW B41b – this is deeply rutted

(AC) Seconded this as it is a commuter as well as leisure route – well used

(RW) Good to get a steer from the forum on how best to allocate funds

(CH) consensus seems to be to concentrate on the damaged routes outside of Stanmer – Race Hill, then Sweet Hill and see how far the funds extend to improving others

Actions:

- ***(AP) handle on gate at top of Wilson Ave needs replacing***
- ***(CH) progress surface improvements as outlined above***
- ***Falmer Rd path – fencing damaged by out of control vehicle. (CH) to arrange replacement***

Legal Rights of Way Work

- Benfield DMMO: Public Enquiry to be held 15-16th October 2024. Statement of Case submitted 17th June
- Longridge Avenue – pushing for resolution on how the opposed order will be dealt with under the new Cabinet system

(DB) strong representation on how and when this will be resolved as it has been dragging on for 18 months. A timetable for resolution is needed.

(AC) on Planning Applications there is a formal scheme of delegation and then certain representations can be made to committee

(CH) It is likely that straight forward DMMO applications (unopposed) can be dealt with under delegated powers. It is the opposed orders that will need to be treated differently.

Actions:

- ***CH to chase legal on timings for Longridge Ave application (process for dealing with opposed orders)***

5. Missing Links / Lost Ways / Unrecorded Paths

As above – Longridge Avenue

(DB) Missing Link 52 (Pickershill Farm) – it looks like this will come into effect through the Farm Review process (City Downland Estate Plan).

6. Any Other Business

(DB) Back in March the undercliff path was cleared by machine but the drainage holes were blocked. Can these be cleared as it is causing flooding. Cllr Earthy has been raising issues about conflict between walkers and cyclists on the undercliff

(AC) Can there be a discussion on better access for people using mobility aids to get to the sea across the beach. There are examples overseas of much better access strips laid down. (LS) the one next to Sealanes is very difficult to navigate on wheels. (LB) has seen old industrial conveyor belts used – laid down in the summer and taken up in the winter. (LS) improved summer access would be much appreciated.

Actions:

CH contact seafront office about clearing drainage holes on undercliff

CH to invite a rep from the Seafront office to a future LAF meeting to discuss accessibility on the beach

Dates of Meetings 2024: (Thursdays 6-8pm)

24th October