

Brighton & Hove Local Access Forum Meeting – Minutes 23/01/2025

Attendees:

Luke Burstow (LB) *Chair*

Dave Brookshaw (DB)

Andrew Coleman (AC)

Ali Polawski (AP)

John Funnell (JF)

Pete Hodd (PH)

David Taylor (DT)

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

Apologies:

Liz Symes (LS)

AGM Voting in of Chair (CH)

Luke has kindly offered to continue as Chair of Brighton & Hove LAF – proposer was John Funnell, seconded by David Brookshaw and unanimously voted in by the group. DB recorded a vote of thanks from the group for Luke's continued efforts as Chair of the group and dedication to the role.

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Minutes agreed. Actions update:

- AC and LS to draft a response to the Groynes Field planning application – letter sent, AC to see if planning decision has been made
- CH to employ contractor to fix Falmer Rd path chicane – under current spending controls can only spend on health and safety matters
- CH to progress promoted routes on council website – outstanding
- CH to follow up on how to make a request for a dropped kerb on accessibility grounds: transport.projects@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- CH – Keep the group informed of progress at the flooded bridleway in Saltdean – works to commence 11/02/2025
- CH to clarify the situation with representations at Planning Committee – representations from applicant allowed if the order is not supported / or if it is supported and the objector is going to make representations at the meeting (DB Longridge - the votes in favour of the order being made were 8 to 2)
- Once spending controls are lifted CH will order new temporary gates and ramps

2. Discussion Items (Standing items)

City Downland Estate Plan (CDEP):

DB – James Woodward is greatly missed, things have gone quiet since his departure and it doesn't look like he will be replaced. (CH – Jessica Hamilton is seeking a secondment to the role on a 2 day / week basis – probably from the Ranger Team). Cllr Tim Rowkins is doing a great job as chair of the DAP. Tim explained the financial restrictions placed on the council at the moment – strict spending and recruitment controls – while the council tries to claw back the deficit. The senior team have been restructured, but this may lead to more pressure on front line staff.

LB – what is happening with the Ranger restructure?

CH – The manager of the Rangers was on short term secondment (acting up from the Ranger Team). It is likely this will be extended while the restructure of Cityparks and Leisure Services (being amalgamated) is sorted out.

PH – There is no doubt more pressure on staff as well if vacant posts / secondments can't be backfilled

AP – any news on what is happening with South Downs Riding School site?

CH – Estates have not been able to find a tenant for this site. It is likely that it will be subsumed into the Ranger Conservation Grazing program (under Higher Level Stewardship funding) and grazed by sheep

AP – this is a welcome decision as the site will suit sheep grazing

DB – the new development at Mile Oak – this is close to the Sussex Border Path and DB has been assured that links to it will be created from the development.

CH – There have been two deaths in the Estate tenancies – David Cross at Mile Oak and Patrick Allen at Challoners and New Barn. Both are hereditary succession tenancies – so there is no case for renewing the terms of the tenancy agreements at this time. However, Jessica is keen that farm plans are made up in line with the Whole Estate Plan and SDNPA. This may be a time when we can put forward the missing link from Falmer Road at Ovingdean up to Balsdean DT – but no power to enforce this as tenancy is not up

CH – no, but no harm in asking if they would consider it

AC – Estate Plans were established by the National Parks to look at how the land in the park is managed from farming to ecology and access, infrastructure, sustainability etc. They are now being used in Town Planning – looking at permitted development rights and impact on the National Park.

DB – this is where James Woodward's work on the task and finish groups was very helpful. The two new permissive footpaths at Pickershill were a direct results of the farm plan intervention.

PH – is the agreement / rights of way at Pickershill affected by the divide in authority – with half of it in ESCC / Lewes District?

CH – no, permissive agreements are made by landowners regardless of the highways authority. The two new footpaths do fall within Brighton & Hove.

CH – as well as DB attending the DAP meetings, CH attends the Officer update meetings after each of the DAP meetings. This provides some updates on what is going on in the estate.

Transport Partnership

(PH) Valley Gardens project continues – there is some concern from local residents and businesses about the temp closure of St James Street – reducing access to shops and complications for access to dwellings. PH lives in the area

and can attest that there has not been good communication about this locally. There will be a lot of disruption for most of next year.

There was a presentation of the new City Plan – with a focus on where new buildings can be located – there are limited sites. As this rolls on no doubt we will hear more about where this intersects with access routes.

This is a newly set up group with new councillors – there was a lot of information about how the group would operate under the new Cabinet system. A lot of general plans at the moment with nothing specific – not a lot of money around right now.

(LB) Preston Park access from London Road has much improved since the works have been completed at the junction with Stanford Avenue. It feels a lot friendlier for non-car users.

(PH) Agrees this is a good stretch. The section from Preston Park north to Patcham is more controversial as the cycle lane will mostly share the bus lane. This is not ideal for cyclists and can be intimidating – especially for less experienced / younger cyclists – will be off-putting.

(LB) Perhaps there are only funds available for painting lines on the ground rather than major infrastructure changes?

(PH) Links to the countryside have been taken out of the plans. A section of NCN20 has been deleted by Sustrans as was felt to be unsatisfactory.

More talk about Park & Ride (in the newspaper) – no specifics on sites: Waterhall, Withdean, Saltdean, Falmer? Possible government funds for this.

(AC) Didn't know about NCN20 – this is the flattest route from central Brighton out to the Downs – it is a shame to lose it

(PH) It's a section from Pycombe onwards that has been deleted – rather than the link from Brighton. However, the section of NCN20 from Withdean travelling north is questionable – sharing a cycle and bus lane is not a modern solution for cyclists and will also slow up buses (the bus user group was also unhappy)

(PH) There are some positives in the new active travel routes e.g. Old Parish Lane – Ovingdean to Woodingdean (useful commuter route)

3. AGM Reports

Maintenance & Management

Gate Repairs	14
Gate Replacements	18
Stile Replacement / Repair	2
Waymark installation	15
Vegetation Clearance (from public requests)	12
Surface Improvements	4
Obstruction	6

- Surfacing works: Stanmer Bridleway (BW B51); Racehill easy access trail entrance from Wilson Avenue
- Signage: no parking signs at Old Parish Lane, Motorbiking signs at Dyke Railway Trail, Farm countryside code signs at Pickershill, Ovingdean, Bevendean and Housedean Farms
- New gating to improve access: Old Parish Lane and Warren Rd car park (BW B30)
- Obstructions dealt with: Standean Farm (BW B72), Ovingdean Grange Farm, Patcham Bridleway (BW B68)
- Asset Management Survey – 65% of countryside network complete (average 71% in good condition), of the furniture assets, waymarking needs to most attention (32% missing or in need of repair)
- In progress – drainage works at Saltdean Vale (BW B4/B3)

(DB) Not convinced drainage works at BW B4/B3 will solve the problem. With a history of flooding here needs senior management / councillors to commit resources to upgrading the track, rather than dumping on PRow.

(CH) as Rights of Way officer I can only deal with the water run-off issue from BW B3 to help alleviate the flooding issue at BW B4. The track in question is privately owned (it is not a highways maintainable road. As a bridleway it is the duty of the council to maintain it only to the standard of authorised users – horse riders and walkers). The landowner has given permission for an additional drainage pit to be installed. This will be well bunded to prevent overspill. The on-going condition will be monitored.

If future planning applications are put in on Saltdean Vale CH will feed in that upgrading the track to allow for the extra traffic and flooding issues should be a stipulation.

(PH) This happens so often it may be a winterbourne stream was here – better understanding of what is going on would help with solutions.

(LB) involving councillors would be a good idea

(DB) councillors have been copied into communications on this, as has Mark Prior (Head of Transport)

(AC) Be aware that it is contrary to Town Planning to have surface run-off water directed into mains sewers.

(PH) In terms of waymarking and signage – appreciate that this has been flagged from the survey – but generally much better than in surrounding Sussex area.

(LB) Signage on Isle of Wight is helpful in that it indicates where the path is going (destination) and distance. The National Park has very distinctive signage – advertising that people are in the park

(CH) Appreciates this is good practice – but bespoke signage for every location is very expensive and time consuming – BHCC has limited resources for PRow

Actions:

- *CH update on Saltdean Vale drainage project*

Legal Rights of Way Work

- Benfield Valley Notices came down 22/01/25. The paths are being opened back up 27/01/25 and 03/02/25
- Longridge Avenue DMMO – the notices are now up on site for the 6 week period – due to come down on 6th March. If objections are received it will be referred to the Planning Inspectorate. (DB) the notices were ripped down.
- Two new permissive footpaths at Pickershill (1016m & 307m)
- One new permissive bridleway at Roedean (893m)

Actions:

- *CH to replace Longridge Avenue Notices*

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

- Adhering to least restrictive access: 18 new (more accessible) gates installed, replaced equestrian stile at Warren Rd car park, improved access at the entrances to Old Parish Lane
- Surface improvements: Sheepecote / Whitehawk easy access trail BW B41 at Wilson Avenue, Stanmer Park access road (BW B51), pot hole treatment at Ovingdean Grange Farm
- Signage: 15 additional waymarks, farm countryside code signage at 4 farms, control signage – motorbikes (Dyke Railway) & parking (Old Parish Lane), waymarking of 5km of walking trails at Waterhall rewilding project

- Provision of new access: 2 new footpaths at Benfield (99m & 190m), Pickershill permissive footpaths and Roedean permissive bridleway (2.2km)
- Pipeline projects: Coldean Lane crossing (S106), Toads Hoel Valley development – improvements to A27 crossing, waymarking projects (Brighton & Hove boundary walk, gateway sites, bus stop walks)

(PH) With the ash die back works in Stanmer etc can see why the MTB area in Wild Park is on hold for the time being – there are so many ash trees in the area.

(LB) Do need to take down dangerous trees near paths. Future management of those cleared areas is problematic. The section of trees taken out near the cow crossing in Stanmer is now a thicket as the trees have coppiced.

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

Longridge Avenue – as above: the notices are now up on site for the 6 week period – due to come down on 6th March. If objections are received it will be referred to the Planning Inspectorate

One of the new Pickershill permissive footpaths (through the triangular field) was also a missing link

5. Any Other Business

(LB) The issue of devolution is something to flag – with a Mayor for East and West Sussex and Brighton & Hove. This has an impact on PRoW – East and West Sussex have a much larger network. PRoW are well managed in BHCC in comparison e.g. West Sussex LAF have obstructed rights of way that have been on the agenda for years. It would be disappointing if we lost the focus on our local area and ended up with one LAF to cover the whole area of the 3 authorities. This would feel like a step in the wrong direction.

(PH) Also quite concerned – seems like adding a further layer of government. Rye to Chichester is a massive area – how well will that work? One person with a lot of power over a larger area, but how well informed will they be?

(LB) If the Police Commission elections are anything to go by – people feel very far removed from it and there is a very low turn out.

The mayor may be high profile, but distancing local groups further from decision making. The Cabinet system already feels like a distancing from accountability (meetings with fixed agendas with little time to prepare).

Would like to fight for a B&HLAF – not to be subsumed into a Sussex LAF – Brighton & Hove is unique and don't want to lose that

(AC) Agree – too much power in the hands of one person e.g. imposition of housing numbers on local areas to reach targets, short circuiting arguments in the planning sphere. What issues are devolved to this body? Seems more like centralisation.

(LB) The LAF is not just strategic – it's about getting the residents of B&H out using active travel and improving the network. Perhaps the LAF should write a letter to the council to voice concerns

(CH) There is a consultation period that this could feed into

(PH) On the one hand it's a waste of time if this mayor position isn't given true powers, on the other it is a dilution of democracy to have one mayor presiding over 1.5 million people. It seems that the leadership of B&H and East and West Sussex have decided to go for it.

(LB) It will influence the spend on money in the region from central government – push down of funds

Actions:

- ***LB Proposes to write a letter to the council as a statutory advisory body – asking to retain local powers and budget rather than being subsumed into county level. This should be unanimous so please do let LB know if you are in opposition to this suggestion.***

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

24th April

24th July (in person)

23rd October