

Accord for the management of
Rights of Way and Access
in the South Downs National Park
with



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**



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**Hampshire
County Council**




**west
sussex
county
council**



South Downs
National Park Authority

Signed on behalf of Brighton & Hove City Council:


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Gillian Marston, Head of Service, City Infrastructure

Date: 18/5/12

Signed on behalf of East Sussex County Council:


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Karl Taylor, Assistant Director, Economy, Transport and Environment

Date: 30/5/12

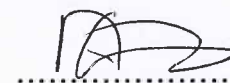
Signed on behalf of Hampshire County Council:


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Andrew Smith, Head of Countryside.

Date: 14.6.12

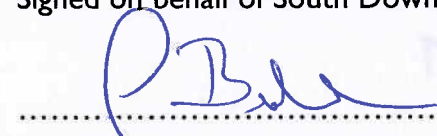
Signed on behalf of West Sussex County Council:


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Andy Ekinsmyth, Divisional Manager, Transport and Countryside Services

Date: 8/6/12

Signed on behalf of South Downs National Park Authority:


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Phil Belden, Head of Operations.

Date: 20/6/12

Accord for the management of Rights of Way and Access in the South Downs National Park

Introduction

Public Rights of Way form a network of paths providing public access across the South Downs National Park. The many Footpaths, Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic total approximately 3,300km. Access Land, country parks, permissive paths and other permitted access complement this.

Purpose of the Accord

This Accord is between the four Local Highway Authorities (LHAs) and the South Downs National Park Authority (NPA) and sets out a basis to achieve shared outcomes for the South Downs through joint working. The aim is to have a high quality Rights of Way (RoW) and access network which meets the recreational needs of the 21st century. To achieve this aim this Accord is a commitment from the partners to manage and to seek to improve the RoW and access network where opportunities arise.

This Accord will be reviewed annually when the partner organisations will assess whether the Accord has achieved its purpose and aims, and to report on work carried out to achieve the Shared Outcomes.

One Vision

The NPA and LHAs recognise the importance of the RoW and access network as the primary means for people to explore the South Downs and enjoy the Special Qualities of the National Park (see Appendix I. "Special Qualities"). The RoW and access network enables people to reach areas of Access Land, visitors and local communities to reach local services in a sustainable way, and plays an important role in delivering health and other social benefits. Through partnership working the Accord partners will strive to provide a high quality RoW and access network befitting a National Park.

Working in Partnership – a shared responsibility

The LHAs and the NPA must have regard to the Purposes of the National Park (ref. National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949) which are to:

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area;
- promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Special Qualities of the Park by the public.

Working in partnership with the local authorities and other organisations, it is also a duty of the NPA to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park in pursuit of the above Purposes (ref. Environment Act 1995).

The NPA will work in partnership with the LHAs and others to bring added value to the RoW and access network. This work will aim to achieve improvements to the network for

the public's benefit over and above LHAs statutory duty to maintain RoW. This will include work that will:

- a. encourage a greater diversity of people to enjoy the National Park;
- b. provide disabled or less able people the opportunity to better access and enjoy the National Park;
- c. remove barriers to allow easier access for all users to and within the National Park;
- d. meet the aims of LHAs' RoW Improvement Plans and Countryside Access Plans;
- e. create new or enhanced access that meets the identified needs of the public;
- f. provide information to the public including enhanced signage, interpretation or promotional material;
- g. support and enhance the rural economy of the South Downs; and,
- h. engage with stakeholders in the community through dialogue and enabling volunteer involvement.

The Accord in Practice

1. The NPA and LHAs commit to good communication, sharing of information and reporting. This communication will include:
 - a. regular meetings between officers of the NPA and each LHA;
 - b. all LHAs meeting together with the NPA at least annually to enable the NPA to produce an annual report on access management in the National Park;
 - c. LHAs working with and consulting the South Downs Local Access Forum on issues as necessary;
 - d. close working between the NPA and LHAs in relation to the South Downs National Park Management Plan, in which Access and Rights of Way will feature strongly; and,
 - e. regular reporting between partners on work carried out on the RoW and Access network and on the condition of RoW.
2. The LHAs will manage RoW to ensure they are freely available and easy to use by the public. This work includes:
 - a. path surface repair works;
 - b. path surface vegetation clearance;
 - c. signposts from the road and waymarking at intermediary points where appropriate;
 - d. the maintenance of bridges;
 - e. necessary enforcement action to remove obstructions;
 - f. maintaining the Definitive Map and Statement; and,
 - g. a commitment to work with landowners to remove or replace stiles where possible and appropriate with less restrictive options and to improve gates to improve accessibility when opportunities arise.
3. The NPA, as Access Authority, has responsibilities and powers under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for all land classed as "Access Land". This work includes:
 - a. entering agreements with landowners to provide a means of access;
 - b. providing a means of access in the absence of an agreement; and,
 - c. excluding or restricting access.

4. The NPA will work in partnership with the LHAs to promote understanding about access to the countryside. This will include:
 - a. working with the public to promote an understanding of responsible access to the countryside; and,
 - b. working with landowners and managers to promote an understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to RoW and Access Land.
5. Opportunities will be explored to progress joint working partnerships with local, regional and national partners. This may include, for example, joint bids for national funding, or NPA and LHAs working with other local authorities, organisations and other groups.
6. In association with Natural England, an established arrangement is in place for the management of the South Downs Way National Trail with the NPA and LHAs. This is described in the SDW Maintenance Practice Note (see Appendix 2).

Shared Outcomes

- A commitment to providing a high quality and easily accessible RoW and access network for the benefit of users, visitors and residents.
- A commitment to high standards of work and design that are sympathetic to the special landscape of the National Park and are in pursuance of its Purposes.
- Meeting the needs of local communities demonstrated through engagement with stakeholders and working with volunteers.

Appendices

Appendix 1. South Downs National Park Special Qualities

Appendix 2. South Downs Way Maintenance Practice Note July 2011

Other Appendices to be developed:

- a) Communications and reporting in detail (TS to set up working group)
- b) LHAs' Priorities statements (LHAs to provide simple statements for sharing internally)
- c) Signage policy/Design guidance/standard specifications (Andy Gattiker to lead)
- d) Volunteer practice note (to be looked at in summer following reviews in SDNPA and ESCC and policy from WSCC)
- e) Promotional strategies (no timetable)
- f) Funding mechanisms for SDNPA/LHA work (TS to draft May - June)