

Hassocks Amenity Association Footpaths and Cycle Ways Focus Group

The way forward

The Process

The Focus Group consisting of eight members (four HAA committee members and 4 others with personal involvement in local footpaths and/or cycle ways) met on 19th August and 'brainstormed' this topic with a view to establishing some strategic principles. There follows a summary of the views agreed.

Background

Hassocks is relatively well served by footpaths in the village and the adjacent countryside, and we are fortunate to have the volunteer Monday Group constructing stiles and bridges and clearing undergrowth. Indeed, Hassocks is well-known for the willingness of the residents to volunteer to support community projects. The footpaths and cycle ways are generally well marked, and it is recognised that West Sussex has a reputation for good practice in this area. Nevertheless, the surface of many paths is poor and particularly during the winter months, many become impassable. There are also 'gaps' in provision where a short link between existing paths could dramatically improve the value of the overall network. Set against this background, the following principles are suggested as charting the way to further improve the situation. Specific examples are given showing how and where the principles might be applied.

The Principles

1. 'Green corridors'

Ensure that all future housing development in and around Hassocks enhances local footpath provision by maintaining the existing paths, providing additional paths where appropriate and retaining some open spaces together with tree planting to sustain the rural character of the village. (e.g. any further development to the west and north of the new Clayton Mills estate should be very carefully landscaped and include additional paths.)

2. 'Link Paths'

Complete or re-establish paths where linkage between existing paths would improve the general utility of the overall network. (e.g. complete footpath 13K running north east from Clayton where it stops abruptly at New Road. Establish a footpath from Woodside northwards along the east side of the railway to link with the Burgess Hill footpath 60 just south of the railway bridge. Another example would be to construct a short length of pavement on the west side of Lodge Lane from the corner of Dale Avenue to the entrance to footpath K12.)

3. Accessibility

Current guidance on accessibility states that public rights of way should meet the present and future needs of the public including blind people and those with mobility problems. Given the ageing local population, the *future* needs aspect should be seriously considered and consultation with actual and *potential* users carried out as recommended.

Establish a limited network of paths providing a circular route accessible by wheelchair and by those unable to negotiate stiles. (e.g. note that gates are far better than stiles in this respect so a change in council policy may be called for.)

4. Cycle Ways

Establish safe cycle ways to all neighbouring villages - i.e. Burgess Hill, Ditchling, Clayton (and thus the South Downs) and Hurstpierpoint. (e.g. the existing joint foot and cycle way from Hassocks to Burgess Hill is a good example of what can be achieved.)

5. Maintenance of Paths

Encourage the general public to alert the local Ranger to particularly poor surfaces which are liable to discourage walkers and may become dangerous to use. Also encourage the general public to carry secateurs with them to trim over-hanging vegetation obstructing any path, and dog walkers to always carry a 'poo bag' to collect and take home their dogs faeces. (e.g. Footpath 27C around Woodbine Cottage and footpath 13C near Coldharbour Farm are treacherous even in the summer months, and the newly re-surfaced footpath K12 off Lodge Lane is already becoming overgrown in places and suffers from dog mess not being cleared up.)

6. Volunteer Groups

Encourage the Parish, District and County Councils to work with the many local volunteer groups to reduce the cost to the taxpayer of maintaining and improving local footpaths and cycle ways. (e.g. The National Trust (NT) runs many volunteer groups and the Friends of Wolstonbury is a good local example where regular tasks such a scrub clearing, fence construction and gate installation is carried out by volunteers under NT supervision.)

FJM 01.09.'14.