

## Appendix 2 - Countryside Access Strategy - summary of survey responses – September 2016

In total, there were 386 responses to the Countryside Access Strategy survey and consultation.

- **Strategy:** The ‘needs’, ‘vision’ and ‘strategic outcomes’ detailed in the draft strategy were all given good levels of support by survey respondents (ranging from 69%-96%.)
- **Rights of Way (RoW):** The proposal for RoW management to remain in-house also received strong support (80%) both in terms of the survey questions and other narrative comments.
- **Countryside sites:** Just over half (56%) of respondents supported the proposal to pass countryside sites to other organisations. 16% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this proposal, with 27% of correspondents stating they ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ or ‘didn’t know.’

These findings are supported by a common theme within the narrative comments. Namely, that there is not enough detail contained within the strategy to ascertain if the handover of sites should be supported or objected to.

### 1a. Summary of survey findings

#### i. The ‘needs’ for public rights of way and countryside sites

The needs defined within the strategy were positively supported by the survey responses. In terms of ‘Health & Wellbeing’ and ‘Conservation,’ over 70% of respondents strongly agreed with this definition of need. In total, 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with ‘Sustainable economy’ being defined as a need.

#### ii. Our vision for the service

The strategy’s vision statement received a good level of support. 49% of respondents strongly agreed with the vision, with 37% agreeing. (86% in total.)

#### iii. The four strategic outcomes prioritising future spend

The four strategic outcomes detailed in the strategy received a high level of support. Over 80% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic outcomes of ‘Safety’, ‘Rights’, ‘Optimum,’ and ‘Community’ should be used to underpin our future plans.

#### iv. Our methods for meeting these four strategic outcomes

##### Rights of Way

80% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal that RoW management in East Sussex should remain in-house.

A total of 4% of respondents ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with this proposal.

## **Countryside sites**

56% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal that the management of countryside sites should change, with sites being passed to another organisation. 8% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed. (16% in total.)

27% of correspondents 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or 'didn't know.'

### **v. Previous engagement in the Countryside Access Strategy**

17% of respondents had been involved in the previous survey.

### **vi. Use of Rights of Way and Countryside Sites**

Walking on RoWs is the most popular activity for survey respondents. (87%)

Seven Sisters Country Park is the most-visited site (55% of respondents.)

### **vii. Interest in taking on sites from groups responding to the survey**

35% of respondents stated an interest in taking on the management of countryside sites (18 respondents in total.)

## **1b. Common themes from narrative comments**

### **i. Rights of way**

In-house management was generally supported. Increased enforcement and landowner liaison was a common theme. More should also be done to work with volunteers.

### **ii. Countryside sites**

Several comments stated that sites should remain under ESCC management to ensure they are protected in the future and properly managed. Other respondents pointed out that there was insufficient detail in the strategy proposals to assess whether the handover of sites could be supported (or otherwise.)

There was general support for the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way remaining in-house.

### **iii. Other general comments in relation to the survey and strategy**

22 (6% of total) respondents made comments that the strategy and survey were either difficult to understand or lacking in detail.

## **1c. Site-specific responses**

The three sites eliciting the majority of responses were Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve, Seven Sisters Country Park and Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve.

- In regards to Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve, many respondents were happy with ESCC's current management and strongly objected to the hand-over of the site. Respondents also saw Chailey as a very complex site (due to the landownership and

ecology etc.) Several commented that the strategy does not give enough detail as to how the site would be effectively managed without its current condition worsening.

- Seven Sisters Country Park was also seen as an iconic and very important site for the County. Many felt it should remain under ESCC management. Several comments also felt that ESCC was not making the most of the opportunities that came with the site.

Several comments suggested that the South Downs National Park Authority or National Trust would be most appropriate to take the site on.

- Several correspondents felt that Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve currently works well with ESCC management and that, if the site is passed over, suitable organisations to support the 'friends of' group may not be available.

In regards to the other sites proposed for 'handover' by the strategy, comments typically supported ESCC retaining management of the sites, although with better liaison and support from volunteers and other organisations.

Both the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way are proposed to be managed 'in-house.' There was general support for this proposal.

#### **1d. General comments from Local Authorities and key stakeholders**

The South Downs National Park Authority, Eastbourne Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Wealden District Council and several Parish Councils supported in-house management of Rights of Way.

Wealden District Council strongly disagreed with the proposal to pass sites to other organisations. Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or 'didn't know, respectively. None of the District or Borough Councils stated an interest in taking on ESCC sites.

The South Downs National Park Authority agreed with sites being passed to other organisations. The Authority is also interested in taking on sites.

Rother District Council did not respond in full to the survey, but invited further liaison with ESCC regarding land holdings.

Comments from key stakeholders supported RoW remaining in-house. However, many voiced concerns about handing over sites – particularly in relation to protecting access and ecology on sites in the future. More should also be made of volunteering opportunities.