

Do you have any other comments you would like to make about our plan for public rights of way and countryside sites? - comments

The management of countryside sites should seek to conserve and enhance priority habitats and species as well as ameliorate the effects of global warming on those sites and species

There remains a real lack of connectivity in the bridleway network. More effort needs to be given to opening existing and new links to a wider group of users, eg cyclists and horse riders.

One of the main issues for me, as a regular walker, is the amount of rubbish that inconsiderate people leave behind. However, I think part of the problem is the lack of bins, though of course these cannot go in certain areas so I understand that it could be difficult to implement.

Communication with landowners about maintenance priorities on PRRW, and what the ESCC can do, and where landowners can help is important. This is specific to the landowner.

Good and clear signage (and maps) with the different public access status of different PRRW is important for all.

The questionnaire is full of corporate tech speak and phrases that mean very little. A prime example of how money is wasted by public bodies.

Did the questionnaire have to use so much management speak? It amounted to the verbal equivalent of wading through treacle! The problem with the language is that, when translated into practice, it can be used whatever those controlling the work want it to mean.

At this point, I have to raise a specific problem. This consists of the blocked bridge on the Vanguard Way at High Hurstwood, which has been put out of use by a landslip. It has been like this since 2016 and East Sussex Council has a "blocking order" on it which does not expire until 2017. According to the Ordnance Survey Sheet 135, it ought to be possible to construct a diversion via Shadwell Farm and I wonder has this alternative been attempted?

I am offering this as a case study. As I have indicated East Sussex's plan for managing rights of way will remain so much waffle unless it confronts, and resolves, the specific kinds of problems that I have indicated above.

I also note that it is intended to keep the management of rights of way in house, a policy which I fully endorse. I do wonder whether East Sussex's councillors, when they discuss the plan, will realise that the arguments for pursuing such a policy apply to council services across the board.

I should point that I live in South East London and have used footpaths in East Sussex via public transport for around 26 years now. On the whole, I have found the maintenance of rights of way in East Sussex pretty good and far better than other authorities I will not mention.

Why no questions about income, housing tenure or employment status? Such considerations are far more relevant to the problems East Sussex are addressing than "faith", gender or ethnic origin.

This outcome seems to have the best balance of maintaining access while making best use of limited resources. Other organisations with expertise in countryside management would be better placed to manage the countryside sites. There is a distinction between the wider appeal of the Seven Sisters Country Park with large numbers of foreign tourists and other sites which are mainly local amenity sites. PROW do appear to be better managed by the council directly.

I think the National Trust should take over management of the Seven Sisters Country Park as they have the long term experience of managing such a complex and multi activity site with strong commercial aspects. There is no other organisation that had the combined conservation and commercial experience necessary to successfully deliver this internationally important site

1. Ensuring and extending public right of access to paths, trails and countryside is top priority.

2. If, as proposed, a partner is engaged to manage some countryside areas, ESCC must insist that the contract includes specific measurable deliverables with penalties for non-compliance. This will help ensure that ESCC's aims are met.

3. A partner should be encouraged to develop appropriately scaled public facilities such as toilets, cafe, visitor centre. This will add to public amenity and could increase longer term financial viability for the partner.

Vision Statement does not address Landowner and Farmer needs sufficiently. While being a supporter of the footpath network in East Sussex there needs to be a higher profile awareness of the issues Landowners, Farmers and other businesses face with the public not respecting private property and their duty to stay on the right of way not wander wherever they want to.

I welcome any acceptance from ESCC about the need for diversions and changes for privacy, security, changes in business use etc

As a regular walker in the now Combe Valley countryside park I have yet to become aware of any positive impact by the rights of way team. Nor is there much evidence of the rights of way team in the east of the county, as many rights of way are impassable. Most of the work in this area is done by Green Gym, TCV or Friends of volunteers. These are usually working with HBC, local PCC's or landowners, and not with county. There needs to be a more holistic approach across the county, involving stakeholders, volunteers and other authorities, not just left to county rights of way team.

This survey is not easy to understand. The language may be what you use but it is a bit high brow and seems far removed from a walk in the countryside, which is what we like to do.

Safety - need to keep cows off public rights of way, they can be dangerous.

Need to keep less used paths, chopped back vegetation that hinders the walk.

I volunteer at Seven Sisters Country Park and we are fast becoming a victim of our own success. Increasing visitor numbers unfortunately means greater traffic and the main A259 road often gets very gridlocked.

I'm sure you're very aware that the root cause of much of this congestion is the totally inadequate 'one way' bridge over the Cuckmere river at Exceat. Although a simple answer might be to instal traffic lights which operate at times of maximum traffic flow ultimately a new bridge might have to be built!

to be honest, I am not sure I really understand what your plans are for public rights of way and countryside sites....I mean what they are in reality - how they will actually effect those of us who use these rights of way and sites on an almost daily basis.

I use public rights of way in the east sussex / kent areas every day, in fact walking in the countryside and using footpaths is my primary exercise activity.

well maintained, extensive and well connected/linked public rights of way are extremely important to me.

Make sure any changes proposed at current RoW or sites are well known to residents well before implementation, so any concerns can be dealt with before changes take place.

I believe old rights of way should be strongly defended so that they continue to exist. Also the public should be encouraged to use them, as this is a good way to protect them.

Will you take suggestions from the public?

Management of all countryside sites and public rights of way should be tailored towards the needs of the environment, wildlife, and bio diversity.

The needs of humans, whilst I strongly believe they are important, should come second.

Money should be focused on sustaining and building on protecting all sites for the future.

Organisations that have expertise in this management (Woodland Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust etc) should be supported financially and encouraged to use their expertise for the good of the sites and public footpaths.

1. The document is verbose. Your so-called executive summary does not summarise. A proper Executive Summary is a must.

2. You propose to "Enable and support landowners, stakeholders and residents to exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities". But the document lacks any detail about the meaning of "enable and support". For example, you have a scheme to contribute 25% towards the cost of repairing bridges etc. Why is that not mentioned? I have personal experience of the scheme not being mentioned when I was asked, as a responsible landowner, to carry out expensive repairs to a bridge.

The proposal to work together with partners to see if the management of the countryside sites can be improved is reasonable enough. However, I believe that the sites are currently managed with minimal budgets compared with similar sites elsewhere, and I will be surprised if it turns out to be possible to significantly reduce the overall costs any further as part of this process. If other organisations can be found which are willing to put their own cash [or other resources] into the sites, thereby saving ESCC monies, then all well and good, although it also needs to be borne in mind that passing the management of just the 'best' sites over to third parties is likely to increase the challenges of managing the remainder. More than anything, I hope this does not turn into a 'get rid at any price' process, underlain by a philosophy of disposal rather than reasons of real savings and/or public benefits.

It is very important that public rights of way are maintained for our children, grandchildren and the generations to come. Once lost they would be difficult to reinstate. I fully support an inhouse approach.

hi in the last 2 years I have been able to re start horse riding, I am a hasting lady and grew up around the beautiful country side of Hastings. I have also cycled most of my life.

I have noticed many of the bridle paths and country paths are no longer maintained, after speaking to several locals I have been informed that even though an offer from volunteers to maintain these pathways were put forward they were sadly rejected. I believe that all pathway across the country side should be maintained in some way either by the regular users or from volunteers, I myself and others would also be keen to help. I walk with my grandchildren all over my local area and they love the wild life, plants and views they come across. this is far better than having the next generation sitting on tablets and in front of TVs playing games. good exercise and a look at the natural beauty that is around us is the best thing.

it makes you feel so much better after a walk across the country side, peace and quite, just the birds and the wild life to watch . magic.

I think that 'passing the management of sites on to other organisations' is weasel words for privatisation, a slippery slope that eventually means that private companies get hold of our public spaces, and can then do what they like with them - The council could retain control of the sites and then commission helpful voluntary and community organisations to help deliver some of the work, if they think it can be done cheaper that way, but keep it away from other private organisations, because if there is a conflict between nature and profit, we can be fairly certain who will come out on top..

I am pleased to hear that ESCC are planning to keep Rights of Way management in house because this clearly works well and having worked for ESCC's Rights of Way team in the past and seen maintenance work outsourced to contractors elsewhere in the county, the quality and responsiveness of the work carried out by contractors pales by comparison. I disagree, however, with the proposal to outsource management of countryside sites. This would lead to an inevitable loss of experienced ESCC staff from an already much depleted team, whom I would consider to already be highly experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement, and carrying out a vital and valued role for the County and its wildlife. One would hope they may be employed by any partners taking over but I suspect this is in no way guaranteed. I believe it will be very challenging to find a partner organisation/s to take on all the countryside sites owing to the costs and responsibilities involved in maintaining assets, plus the Council then forsakes their future management control and any new opportunities for say income generation or improved public access.

I fully agree with the proposed management of Rights of Way, but I don't agree that other organisations are necessarily the best to manage Countryside sites.

The mix of sites would suggest that other organisations are really only likley to intereseted in Seven Sisters, which is likley to mean that other sites would suffer. Why not let existing staff, that are going to have the best knowledge of sites, and all of the correct training and skills, manage the sites to their full potential.

Allowing the County Council to make more money, by investing in the assists that they already have, mainly Seven Sisters, would surely produce extra income that could be invested in other Sites and the Rights of Way.

You don't appear to have given any specific plan, other than you will bring the management 'in-house'. Whether this is beneficial or detrimental remains unknown at the present time, until you release more specific details about any proposed changes.

As a member of a parish council volunteer group in Mayfield, I am keen to see enhanced co-operation, particularly with enforcement in liaising with landowners.

I strongly disagree with ESCC passing management of countryside sites to other organisations (at present unspecified) as this would not only reduce the control that ESCC has over publicly owned sites but would inevitably lead to a reduction or loss of the ESCC countryside management team.

ESCC would need to provide significant funding to other bodies to support site management activities as no conservation organisation is likely to take on new sites without a funding stream to support management. I don't see how passing over sites and paying for others to manage them can be an improvement on retaining the sites in public ownership and managing them in-house with the expertise that the countryside team already has.

ESCC already has partnerships with other bodies, such as Sussex Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Woodland Trust. They should not abdicate responsibility for publicly owned land and pass it into the charity sector, all of whom are equally short of money for land management.

As a walker, I can see how well maintained most public rights of way are. Anything which can improve upon this, and in particular landowners understanding of their obligations, can only be good news.

I expect you have already spoken to people who use manual wheelchairs but just wanted to mention that one thing that makes it difficult for them is gravel paths. Loose chippings make it very difficult to wheel along even if you have a helper.

We come across many stiles and footpaths that are badly in need of repair and maintenance and hopefully the plan for managing public rights of way will ensure that all public paths are safe and accessible to walkers so that we can continue to enjoy to the full the wonderful countryside around us here in Britain.

It would be wonderful if we could be safely separated from cattle in the fields particularly when the public footpath goes through a field where the farmer has placed cows with calves.

Needs to be accessible for the elderly and disabled and publicised to residents. I was not aware of Shinewater for example but live relatively close to it.

I don't feel that this survey provides enough detailed information for me to be able respond with any certainty. I did in fact almost cancel my response.

Little used/redundant/non-viable routes should be closed/rerouted to maximise benefit to all; landowners and users. Any savings should be directed to enhance popular routes. There are many examples of multiple rights of way traversing a single field. Times change and thus the purpose of some rights of way can no longer be sustained. Historic existence should not be a material consideration.

The verges around Westham are being destroyed by traffic. How can these be better protected? This is especially severe down Peelings Lane, where we experience high volumes of large vehicles & speeding traffic. The verges are the only places where people can escape to & they are becoming non-existent.

It all sounds good, but must be delivered and remain 'on message' far into the future.

Actions speak louder than words.

No

I think it is essential that any contract awarded to outside agencies for the management of countryside sites should make it clear that the bottom line is the protection of the site and it's ecology and NOT profit.

It should be made clear in the contract that any deviation from work to protect the sites should make the contract invalid and ESCC should be able to terminate it at short notice.

Fight obstructive landowners (eg Van Hoogstraten). Encourage good upkeep of footpaths. Resist any reduction in rights of way.

The plan does not seem to suggest anything novel, it states what is obvious and the survey is slanted to justify the plan.

Furthermore the plan just seems to keep repeating the same obvious things.

If your idea of making economies is the vast expenditure that the plan must have cost then you demonstrate no idea of working economically in the real world.

Surely a better plan would be to specify what you want to achieve, create budgets for each heading and then tender the work on the basis of discounts to budget aligned with the opportunity to earn bonus for key improvements.

Having now gone on to Q11 I cannot see the relevance of any of those questions to this survey.

I feel that if you outsource the management of country parks, then however you dress it up, the company will be interested in only making a profit. So quality of service/managment, etc would be lost to make profit

I support the proposal to keep maintenance of the rights of way in house. My experience of walking in East Sussex is that the footpaths and signage are well maintained.

The proposal to hand over management of some of the sites to other organisations better equipped and skilled to do this makes sound economic sense.

It sounds like this proposal is primarily about the further privatisation of state owned services. If these responsibilities are handed over to not-for-profit organisations then I think that would be ok; but as soon as you sell-off services to the private sector then financial profit/saving will become their primary objective as opposed to actually doing a good job of managing the public rights of way.

Funding seemed to be the problem in the past.

I beleive that the Council has the best access to local landowners and the public in order to arrange for improvements to be made, however countryside organisations may know the best way of doing those improvements, as skilled and knowlegeable input is essential.

Your questions and potential answers are structured to give the response you were seeking in the first place, so hardly a consultation

Public rights of way should be increased in general. There are too many places where the public cannot roam and access the beauty of the countryside. Of course protection of plants and animals always needs to be thought of when planning for public access, but there is so much countryside which should be available. This can be done whilst balancing the rights and responsibilities of all interested parties.

Also, outsourcing the management of a common resource like public spaces is a very, very bad idea. This should never be done at all. It should be kept in-house and managed by local government directly as oversight and accountability are key and should be done without profit motive in mind at all.

Public rights of way should be kept as such, and should be clearly sign posted so that users do not feel threatened to use them

When I complained over the Christmas holidays about men "green laning" in Maplehurst woods and ploughing up the ground with their quad bikes, I received no support or interest from the police. I approached Nature England, and now several months later, I am glad to see that the entrance has been made narrower. So I wonder if you will be working in conjunction with other companies such as Nature England and Sussex Police, or who will be the responsible point of contact in such an eventuality.

1. I wish to be informed of the cost of putting together this "vision" consultation and I think should know the cost including salaries of those involved.
2. I do not think that there is any need for it. If you are responsible to your public then ergo you should commit money to maintaining the County's footpaths.
3. I am totally opposed to the farming out of responsibility and management and subsequent ruining of Shinewater Park.
4. I find that the questions/proposals in this survey skirt around the real issues behind all the verbiage, namely how much the respondents VALUE and use these facilities which belong to every single person.
5. I fear that this "vision" hails yet another disastrous development for councillors to opt out of doing their job.

The questions do not seem to address the problems that horse riders have . Bridleways are the only places that horse riders have to exercise these large unpredictable animals in safety, however they are shared by walkers and cyclists and often end by leading onto a busy road. Both walkers and cyclists respectively also have footpaths and cycle paths which are not accessible to horse riders. Therefore the most vulnerable group are at a disadvantage in not having their own right of way. I do believe however that we all ought to share these precious RofW and mutually respect each others need. Sadly over that past few years whilst riding quietly I have been shouted at by walkers and cyclist alike for using these paths. It appears that horse riders are deemed to be arrogant toffs on their high horses. Most of us work very hard just to be able to keep these expensive pets. I must have been born with a love of horses, it would have been so much easier if it had been a love of hampsters!

Horse riders have also been asked not to access bridlepaths due to damage in the winter. This I also understand but where do we go? The roads are these days far too dangerous to ride horses on as a lot of the general public do not have the patience to wait for horses on a road and frequently overtake inappropriately sometimes even sounding their horns which not even the most traffic proof horses can tolerate.

The rural economy relies heavily on the Equestrian sector. Many farms have changed to Livery yards, there are farriers, specialist horse vets, tack rooms, feed rooms, farmers supplement their income by providing hay and straw. The High Weald bridleways Group carried out a study regarding equestrians and the rural economy several years ago. A copy of which was discussed with RofW so I am sure you are all aware of our problems. However we are not a group who shout the loudest and so are rarely taken into account. I notice in your publication your artwork only has one picture of a horse being ridden and that is a racehorse, something that should not happen on a bridlepath!!!!

I believe that some of the countryside sites might be unsustainable if handed to charitable or voluntary organisations. They require income/funding for their work and some sites will present little opportunity to make money. If public money is available initially to support these sites there is no guarantee that this funding will not be reduced or cut entirely in the future. What happens if the new managing organisation fails? Many voluntary organisations rely on free labour which is often notable for the large proportion of highly skilled but older people. It can be difficult to get younger participants. There may be a risk that the numbers of new recruits will not keep pace with the loss of older skilled volunteers.

Countryside sites need to be available for free for our residents

There is nothing in any of the statements that I have read here about maintaining the quality of the sites. There should be something to this effect.

Need to ensure best use of resources & avoid duplication. Work with National Trust & South Downs Park

You have finally realised that in house management is the most efficient method. Cheaper than using outside private for profit organisations,

no

Public rights of way and countryside sites are extremely important and must be well maintained and well-signposted.

It is very important that access gate and styles are maintained at when they pass through hedgerows these are cut/pruned, it is also important that footpaths are kept clear in particular when these cross fields that have crops growing.

We're developing a Sussex Hospices Trail - 200 mile permanent long distance footpath route (available on a app) to connect the twelve hospice areas in Sussex. It's to raise awareness of their work and to provide a venue for collaborate fund raising.

In planning this project our team at Friends of Sussex Hospices has seen, at first hand, the importance of PROW's and their vital role in allowing us to connect with the environment and see our county in new ways.

For example it's very clear that in recent developments ie Combe Valley Rd, access issues and walkers rights have been factored. In contrast, in the past, ie A22 at Uckfield it seems as though there was no consideration of PROW's when that road was built about how it would affect access to the countryside.

This change is really commendable.

I have been impressed by the service provided by the RoW staff in the past and would like the service to be protected. I am opposed to contracting out.

In view of the likelihood of increasing financial constraints in the immediate future I would advocate a greater effort to recruit and support volunteer helpers. This will inevitably involve attempting to achieve the highest possible coordination with the various voluntary organisations that associate with your own objectives and methods under the current review.

This approach will become increasingly necessary if the funding reduces over coming years.

I believe that a strong effort to strengthen and manage your voluntary support organisation will widen your ability to meet your objectives for the future.

Your plan doesn't seem too different too what you had in place 4-5 years ago, when you had a very well established system in place, of volunteers, who helped your rangers on a regular basis. Now I'm with another group of Vols who help out one of your rangers on fairly regular occasions

Countryside sites being managed by 'partner agencies' is wrong. This amounts to a land give-away which will be probably also be subsidised by public funds. This is public land that needs to remain in control of a fully accountable public body. Please stop giving away public assets, particularly when still relying on the public to fund it, they are not yours to dispose of to partner agencies. The duty of the county council is to protect our rights of way and protect the last few areas of nature for future generations, this responsibility is completely absent from your vision.

As a farmer with footpaths crossing fields, I feel it requires a sympathetic attitude from users of paths. We have had to make gates self closing, as there have been several incidences of gates being left open if they are not completely "idiot proof". Most users are no problem, but some seem unable to respect our workplace. We often enjoy the chance to chat about what we are doing with people who are not familiar with the countryside, and have a permissive path so evidence of the industrial iron workings can be seen.

It would now be more appropriate to close or divert several rights of way that are never or rarely used. Put the cost saving into managing the well walked paths.

It is dangerous to walk through some farms with cattle and the general public should not be put at risk, especially as most have become so detached from the ways of the Countryside. Most of these footpaths were originally used by farm workers who knew about the dangers of livestock.

Livestock worrying by dogs also needs to be addressed while walking footpaths.

Conservation for wildlife should be the key driver of any countryside policy - we've been abusing the countryside and its wildlife for too long

I feel very strongly about supporting the countryside. However the council maintained a foot path that runs through some land that I rent, we fenced the footpath off so walkers would not be bothered by the animals. So the council put in a self closing gate and took out the styles one which was a boundry fence. due to this one of my animals got out on to the main road as the council failed to put in a gate at the other end of the footpath, or in between the two properties. this is not proper maintenance. or care to land owners.

I would also like to raise the subject of bridal ways that have been driven over by vehicles, leaving deep wheel trenches which are a danger to people and animals using them.

Ragwort is a huge problem and should be cleared from all footpaths and fields that are open access to the public, as if not it is easily transported across the countryside on people and animals feet at the time that the seed heads drop. I do think that ragwort is listed under the dangerous weed act.

Please take my views into consideration, as the countryside is for all not just to keep people healthy to the expense of livestock and land owners. thank you

There needs to be a plan to ensure that the rights of way are maintained; are accessible and waymarking and stiles are clear.

Outsourcing does not save costs. Invariably outsource cost savings (if there are any) are because of poorer quality of service. Beware !!!

Basically "selling off" our countryside as well now, ill we be charged fees to visit places that we love? A walk in the countryside will become like a visit to Stonehenge, pay a fortune to get in. Ridiculous.

I believe it absolutely necessary to ensure all parties are included in any decisions made regarding management, rights of way, conservation etc - too often members of the public hear of decision made without being properly consulted - the whole point of public right of way is that they are for the public.

Conservation of course & the sensitivity of certain areas can prevent these from being open at all times - again it would be important to be informed of the changes as they happen.

all seems very sensible

I think countryside management should be an integral part of all departments especially planning. It is not only its use but the visual aspect of the countryside which enhances lives. So although we are told we are not 'entitled to a view' consideration of planning applications should also take surrounding residents' views and the vista from passers-by. All too often there is a nod to conservation and the environment but only as an afterthought to gain permission to build.

As gaps are filled by new houses, roads and industrial parks, East Sussex is losing its essential essence and becoming another faceless shire county; please do not let that happen.

Concern about sub-contracting services at countryside sites

Maintenance costs could be reduced by working with and enlisting the goodwill of landowners rather than seeking confrontation.

we must make sure that we all have a clear understanding who manages the rights of way and who is responsible to keep stiles and footways safe and accessible. In other words the

responsibilities between the land owner and County Council.

They must be kept open, you must not allow government cuts to stop you from keeping them open and enforcing this

The parks need to be managed effectively with an effective strategic plan and effective investment in the buildings and the general infrastructure. Especially Seven Sisters Country Park - this has a mass of opportunities to grow and develop and earn revenue for the council and serve the East Sussex community. It needs sensible investment and at least broadband and also the rents need to be collected. Shame on you ESCC for cutting services when you have a site that can be brilliant with some sensible investment and some innovation and common sense thinking. Set up to the plate ESCC and so wasting money on pointless corporate initiatives. Sort out your back yard please. The rents haven't even been collected for these sites because there's such a lack of care given to it.

I don't know what existed before, and this survey doesn't tell me... so I find it hard to put the issues in context and see what I'm really agreeing to. I agree that safety, efficiency, conservation, sustainability, health and wellbeing etc are all good things - but as opposed to what? I don't really understand the significance of the 'in-house management' question either.

Generally, the text is not written in a user-focused way. Often it's hard to determine what the text is driving at, and meaning is further obscured by unnecessary information eg: "Once the plan is finalised the Rights of Way and Countryside Team will implement it." "All the research is summarised in the plan in three sections: 'Understanding Need', 'Understanding Supply' and 'Technical Appendices'."

Liaise with users as to what is needed eg stiles that are negotiable by the less able, alternative routes so that cattle may be avoided, removing no entry signs erected by locals.

The plan wasn't very easy to understand for a lay-person, so I can't really comment

1 - your vision is admirable, but please spend the minimum of your resources of money and personnel on presentation and the maximum on implementing the plans

2 - please involve local groups e.g. walking clubs, nature watch clubs who have direct local knowledge of the infrastructure and can advise on usage too

3 - add to your strategy the needs of children; as with healthy eating, healthy activity needs education - why not liaise with the National Trust which already has a policy and programmes for involving children in education for using the outdoors to develop a lifelong healthy lifestyle

4 - be cautious about your management partners; the non-performance of the low-tender service to transport patients to hospital appointments is a recent case in point: the low tender was partly because volunteer drivers were to purchase smartphones at their own expense and the result was that large numbers of volunteers were lost. Probably had the company reflected in their tender the expense of providing volunteers with smart phones, their tender would not have won on the basis of low(est) cost. Cheap is sometimes a short cut only visible once operational and the poor quality of the management is exposed at the expense of the taxpayer who has to then pay again to repair the faults.

5- otherwise keep up the good work started with the purchase of the Seven Sisters

Protection of wildlife should be a priority over visitor use. Footpaths should not be sanitised so they become extensions of roadways. Using small different types of paths is part of the enjoyment of the countryside.

Ditchling parish Council would be interesting in exploring the possibility of managing Ditchling Common should management pass to other agencies.

Rights of way should be well maintained and signed; at the same time the welfare and rights of landowners, farmers and wildlife must be taken into account. Countryside sites should be kept as much as possible as countryside and not turned into more suburban type "parks".

As much use as possible should be made of volunteer groups in the repair and maintenance of RoW. They can also be used for inspection and survey work, but in all this their status as volunteers should be respected and they should not be deterred by excessive bureaucracy.

I would like to see more camping facilities for hikers especially wild camp sites.

A large proportion of the area has a larger than average number of aged residents. They need access to easy paths with some capable of wheelchair usage. A stile can be impossible for some and totally deter them from taking a walk in the first place. There should be short walks, hopefully short sections of much longer walks, that would allow aged and wheelchair users to feel part of the "walking" community. PS I am a fit 64 year old but others are not so lucky!

More support for landowners to maintain their PROWs.

imposing a restriction on motorised vehicles from using Byways open to all traffic that are within the AONB , particularly within Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as required by the Habitats Regulations.

Can we please do something about motorbikes and 4x4 recreational vehicles?

Public rights of way used by motorised vehicles are NOT safe and they do NOT enhance the local community.

There are hundred of thousands of miles of roads in this country - motorised vehicles should be removed from our green lanes. Motorised vehicles are a danger to pedestrians, children, animals and horse-riders.

Is it possible to make the old Uckfield to Lewes Railtrack a footpath and cycle track. Like the cuckoo trail? I heard the council had the chance to purchase it in the 1980s

This survey was very difficult to follow, full of jargon and local government speak.

I don't feel I've been given a clear, easy to understand picture of what the changes might look like and the questions felt too broad.

I strongly agree that countryside sites can be more economically managed by other organisations such as the National Trust and Sussex Wildlife Trust allowing more finances to maintain public rights of way, some of which are in poor condition. As an example the Seven Sisters Country Park adjoins the National Trust managed land at Crowlink so one would think that savings could be made without adverse affect.

Public rights of way should continue to be managed in-house as it is important that legal records are kept by one body. ESCC has a very good, easily accessible map and system for reporting problems with public rights of way in place.

Countryside sites must be always protected and managed in the best way. If County Council's work with organisations that can be dedicated to better the safety and management of these sites then I believe this would be better for visitors, residents etc.

I am a Parish Councillor and I farm on the north side of the village of Ticehurst. I have a right-of way leading from Ticehurst towards Tinkers Lane and Bewl which is frequently used. About three years ago I contacted you for a contribution towards improving the right-of-way from Pickforde Lane to Ticehurst Primary School which was on land owned by RDC. You could only give me 5% of costs towards improving this footpath from a boggy mess in winter to an all weather passable right-of-way. Despite the small grant of around £100 we did achieve the improvement to local satisfaction. It would be a nice dream that you could share in the expense of maintaining out rights-of-way in the Weald AONB beyond the installation of post and yellow markers. The maintenance of these rights-of-way largely depends on the landowners. The public right-of-way along the Parish Boundary from Ticehurst to Etchingham is difficult to follow in places.

Landowners do have the problem of inconsiderate users of rights-of-way. Some insist on using bicycles and churning up the paths in winter. They allow their dogs to run all over the crops for exercise. Others prefer to stray wherever they can along hedges round crops. Environmental schemes encourage farmers to have crop margins for wildlife but these are also used by walkers, cyclists and horseriders wherever they can acquire access even in winter.

I work for Hastings BC. A number of the PROW have on going anti-social behaviour issues as well as vegetation management issues.

It would be good to see some reference to the community safety aspects of PROW management. To ensure that community safety and crime and ASB reduction is considered in the management of the PROW network. Some PROWs will need to be closed using appropriate tools

It is important to remember that BOAT carry right to drive and our enjoyment health and wellbeing should be considered.

There are many terms used in this survey that are so vague and lacking in meaning that answering the survey is not easy if one wants to avoid agreeing with what basically amounts to giving over management to outside commercial enterprises. The terms used sound innocent enough but I suspect they have been deliberately used to sway the survey in the direction the council want.

Bottom line, an outside, commercial enterprise should never be given any access to or control of countryside sites under any circumstances.

To continue offering maximum access to visitors without commercialisation. Not to further build and develop with aim of making money.

I believe the routes should be allowed to remain rural, not sanitised and surfaced in an urban style. This is both expensive and gives a false impression of real countryside to visitors from built up areas.

If cycle tracks were separate from pedestrian routes, it would save on surfacing costs for walkers only and make also make it safer for non-bike riders. The two uses do not mix well.

More information should be provided to visitors about the agricultural nature of the area - crops grown etc., to encourage respect for the commercial nature of 'a field'. Grazing stock is good for ground cover control, but deters dog owners to let their pets run free, which in turn can introduce conflict between dogs having to be kept on a lead.

I am a Parish Councillor completing this survey on behalf of Newick Parish Council.

The plan for rights of way we believe should work very well for us as we have a vibrant volunteer group who look after our 8 ½ miles of RoW and already have a good working relationship with ESCC. We would however question exactly how the new system will be funded and will the existing channels of communication continue to work in the same way?

At present we do not have any countryside sites within our Parish but are in the process of developing a SANG and therefore are interested in your plans to outsource the management of countryside sites which is what we may need to do some time in the future. What is unclear from your plan is how this will all be funded. We are aware of the significant cost of managing large sites and know that charities such as the Wildlife Society will understandably charge for this service. Will ESCC continue to oversee the quality of what is happening to these sites or will this also be passed on to for example Natural England?

Although management is needed the countryside should also have a wildness about it. Over management should be avoided. The present public pathways and bridle ways should be protected completely.

I am a little uncomfortable at the prospect of outsourcing work on countryside sites when the benefits can not be demonstrated convincingly in advance. It feels a little like the first step on a slippery slope towards divestment. I would be less uncomfortable if there were a categorical and irreversible commitment to maintain overall ownership and control.

This may be a little beyond scope. It seems a pity that verges are scalped within an inch of their lives at the first sign of summer growth. Wildflowers and the insects and birds they attract are an essential part of the wider ecosystem we are trying to protect. The admittedly rather "freestyle" appearance of these areas is consistent with the traditionally bucolic view that visitors, especially from abroad, have of the "Garden of England" in the summer.

I think it is important that the countryside sites should not lose their connection to the Council should they be managed in partnership with other groups. A council ranger should still be visible at these sites so the public know they are still accessible to everyone.

I think if the sites started to become known as a Wildlife Trust site, for example, this could put people off from visiting them.

Farmers and land owners see the users of rights of way as the enemy what can be done to enhance the experience for both users and owners to promote wellbeing for all?

The Sussex Ornithological Society is able to comment on the impacts on birds, although issues affecting birds will of course also affect other wildlife too.

Our main concern centres on Strategic Outcome 3. This mentions wildlife in the headline outcome but then there is insufficient reference to the need to protect and enhance the wildlife importance of some of these sites going forward. The driver for the change appears to be cost saving and efficiency. This is understandable but there needs to be clarity in the strategy about how the wildlife interest will be safeguarded in any future change to management arrangements.

Without these safeguards the SOS would object to the strategic outcome as currently worded.

On the countryside sites the Rangers seem to be doing a grand job with the resources available. Delighted to see the introduction of ponies and cattle on Ditchling Common. Good to see so much activity from volunteers that reflects a good community feel without the spectre of an overly corporate, number crunching approach. Public rights of way are just that, they exist, people use them and, like anything, from time to time they need running repairs and improvements...not quite sure where else one would want to go with this i.e. it's as it should be.

Footpaths and bridleways are increasingly important for cyclists because of increased traffic density on roads. Please keep developing them, they're a wonderful resource for walkers

and cyclists alike.

We are submitting our comment as previous owners of Ditchling Common Country Park which was compulsorily purchased by ESCC in 1974. We own the remaining area of Ditchling Common and the adjacent Spoil Bank together with Tenantry Down on the north face of Ditchling Beacon, all of which are registered common land. Despite assurances from ESCC in 1974 that the traditional character of the common would be maintained by regular grazing we have been disappointed that this has not happened. The result has been that large parts of the area have been overrun with scrub and trees despite recent efforts to clear areas using volunteer labour. We would therefore welcome any proposal that would transfer the site to an organisations with the resources and proven ability to improve the management of the area.

The document states that ESCC is legally responsible for the upkeep of the Commons Register but our experience has been that the record has not been kept up to date for some time. It is alarming that the description of the content of the Register on Page 11 in the Consultation Document is incomplete. The Register does not only contain the location and boundaries of common land in the county, it also contains a detailed list of rights over the commons. The Rights Section of CL 16 and CL17 has not been updated since 2005 although we have continued to submit amendments as land on which rights are registered has changed hands. This is now causing us difficulties as we can no longer produce correct documentary evidence of who owns the grazing rights which in turn affects our ability to identify who is eligible to belong to the Commoners' Association (our management body).

Access for Disabled people must be taken into account and properly considered at all times. This includes the actual sites & rights of way and information about the sites and rights of way. Disabled people should be encouraged to engage. There are organisations across the County working with Disabled people and those with long-term conditions who would be able to facilitate this.

Apart from making some management in house what are you actually suggesting?

Our public rights of way need protecting and maintaining now more than ever with the way local green spaces in Wealden are being sacrificed to houses, both for public well being and conservation, which is all well and good being part of your vision but how effectively can you achieve this?

Maintenance is crucial - keeping rights of way open and reasonably safe for walkers/horse riders.

However, 'over-management' is counter productive and removes the heart of the countryside experience that people want (getting out into the wild).

Over-management of habitat can be destructive - heart might be in the right place but outcome can be negative. That is, too much fiddling about with the natural landscape and unintentionally ruining what was there in the first place.

Please keep the lines of communication open between ESCC and residents/footpath users. Make it as easy as possible for us to report problems, and for these to be addressed. (for example, moto cross motorbikes beating the heck out of woodland paths; or footpaths that have been used for centuries being taken into private ownership and closed).

Consultation with the public is essential so that people know their views are taken into consideration and that they are being listened to.

I have read the Countryside Access Strategy booklet and agree that maintenance of PRoW should remain under control of ESCC (in liaison with landowners of course). I am concerned as to whom ESCC will appoint to maintain the LNR and CP. As a North Chailey resident I use all Chailey Common LNR daily and having previously lived in Lindfield walked them for 35 years with the family dogs. What are the implications of outsourcing? What are the benefits, other than financial. Specifically with regard to Chailey LNR I would like to see the parish council and local residents become more involved in the maintenance and care of Chailey Commons rather than some external body.

Sell all sites to the National Trust to save ESCC money.

Having worked with your team over the last few years I am very impressed with their expertise, skills and commitment to their work - also their knowledge of the areas they look after.

Having been in construction, land and property management for over 30 years now I have seen many changes but the most damaging has to me been the 'outsourcing' of services to a third party.

At best you may save some money, however in reality this is rarely the case, what you are likely to do is spend a massive amount of time and money managing a contractor who is more interested in achieving his profit on the contract rather than delivering a service.

Further I do not feel this is the correct type of contract to outsource, it is too reliant upon the weather to be able to be specific in setting targets and outcomes which are meaningful - a severe storm and your in-house team will (and have) got on with things, a contractor will not be that flexible and it will cost you.

If you wanted 100 calls per hour answered in your call centre about bin collections fine, that is tangible and measurable. The environment is controlled and experience will dictate that you generally take 100 calls per hour.

Of course if like us you've outsourced your bin collections - you will need to allow for 200 calls per hour!

Another aspect is the management of outsourced services, all too often the need for management of these contracts is overlooked and underestimated, when companies realise this the people you need have probably left and you are trying to manage a contract with an administrator operating a desk.

Contract management is a profession and skill in itself and senior managers seem to ready to fall for the term 'partnering' and forget that there is a contract to be managed and do not resource this.

It is almost impossible to revert back to what you currently have and you would in my opinion be failing both the public and other stakeholders if you changed from your current arrangements.

Finally whilst I agree with the aims of community involvement, volunteers, etc the reality is that it is very intensive to set up and manage this - the time, effort and money may be best spent on the work itself.

That is perhaps one area where I feel outsourcing could work, if you can get a volunteer organisation to take this role over.

I hope that all makes sense and that you do eventually decide to keep the services in house.

1) With regards to revising the charging for services provided to raise income. I think such charges should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain fair, reasonable and commensurate to the service provided and don't just become an additional 'cash-cow' to be milked.

2) The handing over of the countryside sites to external operators, should relieve some of the burden upon ESCC. It will be important though that suitable safeguards are written into such agreements to ensure the new operators continue to adhere to the strategic policy direction (such as open public access) desired by ESCC. Such areas are currently free to access, what if the new operator decide it becomes necessary to make charges? What would the response of ESCC be? Could the land be taken back by ESCC in certain circumstances?

3) Seven Sisters Country Park is a very popular visitor destination, with international recognition as evidenced by the number and scope of visitors. If the future stewards were to have significant resources and a responsible outlook to sympathetically utilise the site, such as the National Trust for example, I would expect that its increase in earning potential could be quite significant. Any handover agreement for this site should include an ongoing benefit to ESCC, or alternatively be used to defray costs at the other less popular sites.

As someone who enjoys walking in the locality of Seaford. I would like to see our 'twittens' well maintained. It would be advantageous to walkers and the environment alike if short journeys on foot were encouraged and motor vehicles left at home. This could be partially achieved by having local footpath maps.

I am troubled that the journey on foot from Exceat bridge to the Seaford boundary is via a poorly constructed footpath along the top of a steep bank alongside the busy A259. This route is particularly dangerous for cyclists who have the choice of disturbing pedestrians or cycling on a very steep road and risking the hazard of tight traffic.

I am glad to see that the plan recognises the value of green spaces in maintaining health and well-being, as well as building community. Green spaces are vital 'breathing space' for humans as well as vital habitats for wildlife. I ask you to ensure that the needs of wildlife are prioritised, alongside the needs of people. I suggest that organisations such as The Sussex Wildlife Trust will provide valuable partners in this work. Not only for the sake of enriching the landscape for the benefit of humans, but also in order to fulfil our responsibilities as caretakers of the land, for the benefit of all life, now and for future generations.

Many thanks for your care and effort.

No part of the management of these areas should be put out to private concerns

Do not loose any rights of way or let them become overgrown and forgotten about.

Unable to answer regarding PROW as we are a neighbouring highway authority and operate a different system. We would encourage working in partnership with other local authorities and across county boundaries, including optimising use of procurement practices and contracts.

I feel that there is not enough emphasis on the economic benefits of promoting the South Downs as destination to visit. When you look at other national parks (e.g. Lake District, Snowdonia and in Scotland), there is a far stronger emphasis on promoting areas of beauty to attract visitors, hikers, mountain bikers and climbers. For example the South Downs Way is not promoted as a long distance walk akin to say, the West Highland Way. It is actually very difficult to walk the whole of the South Downs Way due to lack of infrastructure e.g. campsites and bunkhouses along the way.

There is nothing in the strategy about how the service will assist with the management of local ecology. I'd like to see the 'rewilding' concept adopted as a key principal. This is great for local wildlife, but it also helps to attract visitors by emphasising the natural attractions of the South Downs.

I also feel that once you are off the 'headline' paths such as the South Downs Way, Seven Sisters etc, the rest of the PROW network suffers from poor signage and overgrown vegetation.

I'd like to see car park charges increased to encourage the public to use public transport and other forms of sustainable transport. Perhaps promote towns like Seaford, Uckfield etc as hub towns to leave your car and jump on a bus.

The strategy doesn't seem to include any market intelligence research to inform whether there are third party organisations out there who could feasibly take on some of the countryside sites.

Overall the strategy is very uninspiring and seems to focus on the legal minimums rather than promoting the contribution that the countryside makes to healthy living, eco-tourism and quality of life.

As am disabled an like to walk a little way but find when I come across a sty I find I cannot go any further also uneven paths are also a problem for me as I am unsteady on me feet otherwise not a lot of a problem

My belief is that tasks such as caring for the environment are best off in the hands of public bodies. I don't believe that experience over the last 30 years with the NHS, the railways and other part- or entire privatisations has demonstrated either improved efficiency, reduced costs or improved delivery of service overall. That is of course a generalisation, as some areas of each sector have seen improvements, but it seems to me at inflated cost; the mantra 'private efficient, public inefficient' doesn't in fact bear much relation to reality, as the need of private companies to make higher profits to cover shareholder payments on top of investing money back into the business inevitably raises costs, not reduces them (as demonstrated by the massive cost increases seen on the railways). So, my hope is that any private sector partners employed to manage countryside sites will be rigorously overseen by the council and relevant professional bodies both during the tender process and when any projects are up and running.

1. The Strategy document aims to set out how ESCC should manage PRoW and countryside sites in the future; unfortunately it fails to distinguish between the ten countryside sites and the general concept of the many miles of pathway which constitute the PRoW. My concerns relate specifically to Chailey Common, which I know well, but may also reflect concerns about the other major countryside site.

2. Further and in particular, Chailey Common is not sui generis a countryside site:

- Chailey Common is twice the size of the other seven land-based sites put together;
- Chailey Common is both an LNR and an SSSI – more specifically, it is sub-Atlantic heathland which is ecologically significant because such areas are rare; and because some rare flora and insect-life can be found there. It is not a country park;
- Chailey Common is currently under 'recovering' condition and the County receives until 2021 a Grant from Natural England to promote recovery. The Common is fenced to that effect and to include grazing animals.

3. It is unclear why the Council seeks to outsource its countryside sites and Chailey Common in particular: the Strategy document lists comparisons with Brighton & Hove; Hampshire; Kent; Surrey; and West Sussex – all comparators retain their countryside site management and maintenance in-house. In my view, they are right to do so, since conservation (as opposed to the maintenance of paths and footways) requires botanical skills and an opportunity to exchange knowledge not necessarily to be found in landscape gardeners.

Moreover, the document states in regard to comparators (p.19) that ESCC is competitive in its management cost and level of maintenance, and leading in asset management techniques. This is a tribute to ESCC Ranger staff but makes it difficult to envisage that outsourcing will achieve savings, let alone improvement.

4. The Strategy document makes reference to involving volunteers: Chailey Common benefits from the Chailey Common Society whose knowledgeable members have for many years surveyed the Common and its species, creating a valuable record of the Common's history. The Society has also created and published at its own expense Guides to the features of each of the constituent commons. Residents and members of the Society for many years have volunteered to work on the Common under the supervision of the Rangers; I understand that it is not lack of volunteers but a dispute about insurance which currently inhibits this working force – I doubt whether outsourcing the management of Chailey Common will resolve this.

5. Finally, and to quote the Strategy document (p.16) the document's own survey of usage of the countryside sites states: 85% said the countryside sites were important for wildlife conservation, a percentage more than 60 points greater than the other uses instanced.

It's important to make sure public rights of way remain passable, especially in summer when increased plant growth can block paths.

I wish to highlight one site. Weir Wood Reservoir SSSI & LNR.

I am the Chairman of the "Friends of Weir Wood Society" a volunteer group that was set-up in 1996 to assist the ESCC rangers who managed this site owned by Southern Water.

Since that time we have seen Southern Water reduce the financial income on maintaining this site to the point in 2012 where ESCC pulled out from managing the site for them.

Southern Water have not even been attempting to meet their SSSI requirements, as your report states the SSSI is in unfavourable condition and has been for years, with nothing being done.

If the "Friends" had not agreed to manage the site, it would have been lost as an amenity and conservation site for the local community already.

So we have a site that is currently managed by untrained volunteers, and their lifeline is the assistance being received from ESCC Rangers who are contracted for a number of weekly visits to help us, most notably with power tool work.

An untrained small volunteer group cannot manage this site unaided, when it is owned by a private company like Southern Water who are not interested in giving them full support.

Unless, you can find suitable contractors who can sign a long term contract and maintain pressure on Southern Water to keep this as a conservation site for the local community then I feel your strategy is about wiping your hands from the problem, rather than improving sites for the community at this site.

Our Society has no wishes to run it as a business and employ contractors. These are OAP's who have retired from work, and just volunteer for pleasure and want to help with conservation at this site. If ESCC pull out in 2018, and leave the "Friends" volunteers alone, they would be unable to carry that responsibility. You would have then managed to remove this site from the community, and then there would be a public outcry.

My comments relate to Weirwood Reservoir Nature Reserve. I am an East Sussex rate payer, a friend of Weirwood Nature reserve and an active member of the maintenance Team. The Weirwood site offers unique opportunities for people to see up close wildlife throughout the year and enjoy the wonderful views. In particular many elderly visitors are able to use the car park/bird hide or even view the reservoir from their cars in the small lay bys. Each Tuesday up to 10 volunteers turn up on a regular basis to offer their time free of charge with a view to keeping all the hedges and bushes trimmed plus clearing the vegetation and views of the reservoir. Litter is picked up and the site kept in first class condition. We do have the support of rangers for the heavier jobs leaving some volunteers free to concentrate on the wildlife and wild meadows. The work of the volunteers delivers a first class facility for minimal cost for the enjoyment of everybody. I would urge that the present arrangements continue unchanged delivering benefit for residents, visitors and the wildlife.

Need more supervision of unsafe stiles and overhanging weeds and branches. Also way marks obscured by foliage and difficult to find.

Make the rights of way accessible to all users not just cyclists and walkers.

We need to preserve our countryside and the rights of people to enjoy it. This is more important than ever with the large amount of development taking place in parts of the county.

It is vital that bridleway maintenance and upkeep is included in the programme. There are many many horse riders in East Sussex who are forced to the on increasingly dangerous roads in order to access the bridleways in the county. Some if the existing bridleways get into a poor state of repair or become inaccessible. There did used to be an affordable off road riding scheme called TROT but this is no longer available to the majority of prop!e due to their extortionate fees. Sadly this means people are even more reliant of the bridleways

Minimising human impact on flora and fauna would be a priority for me, and I am therefore pleased to see wildlife mentioned as a consideration under Optimum on one of the

questions.

Too much emphasis is placed on developing large numbers of new houses on any area of green space available, which many towns and villages don't want. We moved to East Sussex because we no longer wanted to be in London, we were overlooked on all sides, the traffic was appalling, crime was rising and more people than ever seemed to have forgotten how to use rubbish bins. There were hundreds of newspapers, fast food wrappers etc just dumped on the pavement. My desire for tranquility and green open spaces in a community that cares about its environment has been realised by moving to Heathfield. Any plan to maintain sites and protect the countryside sites from development is a good one. Communities would I'm sure gather together to help keep these areas clean and safe if it means keeping their little piece of England green and as beautiful as it is.

This will work as long as the ESCC keep up their word. Too many of the public rights of way are overgrown, forgotten or "incorporated" into private owners land because they are unused due to being inaccessible. I used to live next to a footpath which was so overgrown and neglected by the council that it was almost completely unusable. Until I complained to the council asking if I could adopt the area into my garden and then within 48 hours workmen had cleared the path, cut down the offending hedges and made the pathway accessible. This should have been done without me having to remind the council the right of way existed!!!

So if you are prepared to look after the pathways etc, then I will be happy to support you and your ideas

Cuckoo trail is great.

I would like to see more bins emptied more often and reminders about littering and dog poo pick up.

Please stop over-managing these rights of way. The Cuckoo trail is adjacent to our land and is currently being covered in Tarmac! The trees are cut down on the slight off chance they may fall and the whole trail is gradually losing its countryside feel.

The Rights of Way are terribly important, thinking of the Cuckoo Trail, safer than the fast traffic for people who walk.

This all seems fairly sensible, but as always the devil is in the detail.

Two further points:

1) 'Safety' is a dangerous word to use in the context of public footpaths, particularly rights-of-way along old tracks and across fields. Walking in the countryside is inherently a different proposition to walking in towns – it'd be a pity if access was restricted because of fallen trees, etc. I imagine you'll be fairly sensible on this, but I want to flag it as a concern.

2) You mention health, well-being, etc. as reasons for rights of way, BUT access is a big part of their value and appeal. Some paths / bridleways are vital links for me.

Below are a range of comments and observations that Sussex Ramblers have made with regard to the ESCC RoW Strategy consultation. These have been compiled here to provide a more comprehensive feedback than the questions allow.

OBSERVATIONS

The document is fairly lengthy but with little detail supporting the strategy and nothing substantial with regard to volunteers.

A first impression is the strategy focuses on getting rid of the 'open spaces' (except for the Cuckoo Line & Forest Way).

The current consultation policy document makes no mention of the previous general policy embodied in "ESCC Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007-2017"! The RoWIP was a very comprehensive and detailed piece of work, especially the appendices. So it's surprising that it is not included or mentioned in the RoW Strategy.

The production of RoWIPs by all HA's is a statutory requirement of CRoW act. However implementing them are voluntary and our information suggest not one HA has done so.

We believe that a similar document for the next 10 year period should be produced. This is because the budget prospects need to be shown openly in comparison with the previous period. This allows reduced staff resources and potential to achieve improvements to be evaluated as well as maintaining performance of ongoing upkeep of RoW.

RIGHTS OF WAY TEAM PROPOSALS

The proposals do recognise the statutory duties relating to RoW (2.1) and it is recommended to keep RoW management in-house (2.8).

Although the prospect of contracting out maintenance is rejected in the reports to the scrutiny board, the loss of the highly efficient in house maintenance team would be a blow if ever contemplated.

The most positive thrust that emerged during the consultation sessions last year was that they would make greater use of volunteers. This is supported throughout the cabinet paper (esp. 2.3), however there is no mention of the Council resources such work requires.

In 2.4 an estimate of the economic value of RoW is made with the proviso that it's difficult to assess. We would refer to the minutes of the meetings of the Stakeholder group set up in 2001 during the F&M closures, which made clear the substantial losses suffered by a wide range of businesses across the county. Even the CLA was complaining.

In the appendices on page 18 there is a statement: - "We are proud to report that over 99% of our PRoW network is accessible by foot and 80% of the furniture is in a good condition."

All credit to them but the 145 blocked path sections might be only 1% of the network but the lack of progress in resolving the issues is of real concern.

In the 2000 CRoW Act (s53) a cut-off date for unrecorded footpaths and bridleways ("lost ways") has been set at 01/01/2026; thereafter no further Definite Map orders for them would be accepted/processed.

Consequently between now and 2026 it is highly likely that lost ways will be submitted to ESCC for processing onto Definite Map orders.

Discussion has been held with ESCC officers on the subject. They have explained their severely cut budgets and staff resources. There appears to be little or no provision for this potential increase of work-load, including the legal team, to process applications.

COUNTRYSIDE SITES

It might be possible that some of these public sites, such as Camber sands and Seven Sisters could be awarded to organisations that may have hidden agendas. Organisations such as the Sussex Wild Life Trust are likely to be a safe pair of hands. Question remains whether they could have the resources to manage them?

Any assignment of these sites must maintain the right of public access. In some cases without this there is no right of access to these sites, other than on rights of way, and open access could be lost.

Apart from raising car parking fees and unloading the management of the majority of countryside sites there seems little of substance overall. If the latter scheme is to save money, rather than just budget-shuffling, it can only be detrimental for the sites.

RIGHTS OF WAY DIVERSIONS - INCREASE FEES

In these straightened times ESCC could set fees to landowners at a level where they can make a profit. They could then encourage landowners to apply. Although a number of landowners would be put off by the fees, there could be far more diversion requests from richer ones. Safeguards must be placed in the procedures to manage this change to protect the public's RoW rights.

VOLUNTEERS

Experience has been that the ROW team finds it very difficult to work with groups like the Ramblers and has a variable approach to volunteers doing path maintenance. With reduced in-house resources help from volunteer organisations should be actively encouraged.

There should be more emphasis on making cycle tracks and bridle paths. And road awareness for car/van drivers of all other road users. Too many vans and lorries speed down country roads, and in towns eg Bexhill where there are cycle lanes, they are full of parked cars so no use. So making lanes only for non motorised traffic in the country and town has got to be safer for everyone.

I'm less interested in how paths are managed than that they are! The bridleway network in the battle/bexhill area is appalling with very few circular off road riding available. The link road has brought a new track to Hastings but it's a road to nowhere. Horse riders like circular rides of 6 miles plus, with parking for horseboxes. Horse riders support many local businesses but always seem to be last in line for path improvements in East Sussex. Where I lived previously in Buckinghamshire, the council developed many circular rides.

Both as a committee member of The Friends of Weir Wood Society and as an individual I am very concerned about the possible results of your plan for the Weir Wood LNR in particular and all the other Countryside Sites in general. Clearly the desire of ESCC to save money by passing on the management of the sites to other organisations is a risk to the future of these sites that we value so highly. The key factors will be the identity, intentions and resources of the "other organisations" who will take over the role of the ESCC. We are anxious to know who will take over at Weir Wood and what their plans may be. The Friends of Weir Wood Society is a group of over 200 volunteers who contribute a great deal of labour, expertise, money and love to the LNR. We will be pleased to continue to support "our" site and we will work enthusiastically with the new organisation if it has the best interests for the conservation and development of Weir Wood at the heart of their plans. We hold working parties every week which are supported by ESCC Rangers. We will be very sorry to lose this important support and friendly co-operation. However, we will be pleased to support your planning process and to assist in creating the new relationships in any way we can. Please do not hesitate to ask if you would like us to be further involved.

Regarding Weir Wood Local Nature Reserve I have answered question 5 as 'don't know' because it is not clear to me which organisations ESCC is considering for passing management responsibility to. If the proposal is for a well established, 'not for profit' conservation organisation such as Sussex Wildlife Trust to take over, then my answer would be 'strongly agree.' If the intention is to try and pass management responsibility to Friends of Weir Wood Society then I would 'strongly disagree'.

As a committee member (and volunteer worker) for the Friends for many years, I believe it would be totally unrealistic to expect the Friends to take over management of the site. The Friends would naturally be happy to continue to cooperate with a suitable conservation organisation taking over management responsibility for the site.

The Friends of Weir Wood society is a very enthusiastic group with over 200 members, which includes regular weekly work party numbers of 9 or 10 volunteers. The Friends have spent more than £26k over the past 15 years in organising and carrying out conservation work at Weir Wood. The committee does not however have the necessary breadth of knowledge (or inclination) to assume management responsibility required to ensure the long term viability of this nature reserve, which is extremely popular with both members and the general public. It is for this reason that I have answered 'not interested in taking on the site' in question 10 below.

Need to encourage more people to use them for their health. Not easy!

I would like to see ESCC set a national example in establishing (in partnership with land owners) a new network of public rights of way across the county so that cyclists and pedestrian traffic can be separated from motorised traffic.

I believe that currently a lot of people are discouraged from cycling and walking between villages/towns/points of interest because of the risks from traffic on our roads.

Vital to health and well-being especially given the nations increase in obesity etc

We use the Forest Way for example very regularly for cycling and walking.

Because I have no information about who may run your sites it is difficult to comment. My main hope is that they are not transformed into money making entertainment sites, but are run in a sound and sensitive manner that does not disfigure the countryside, for example with large conspicuous car parks.

The council currently does an excellent job of managing countryside sites and I am concerned that these sites if managed out of house will become commercialised changing the the ethos and character for visitors and adversely effecting wildlife. Management is I feel a delicate balance, allowing visitors to enjoy these sites which are our heritage and at the same time minimising the effect on wildlife, which is of course part of the attraction of these beautiful places. They are not like urban parks commercialisation and over use would move them down this route. I understand that we are in hard pressed times with limited budgets, but i do not think that cost should be a major deciding factor.

I am also concerned that these places retain the free access we have all enjoyed for many generations There are not many places which can be freely visited to the physical and well being of all. For example families with young children have less places than ever that they can visit free of charge. Its important for society and health that less well of parents (and indeed us all) can still take their children on outings too. A healthy population is too in the long term cost affective reducing the burden on other services.

What safeguards do you intend to put in place to ensure that the free countryside sites retain their free access and do not become over commercialised?

Thank you.

?

Rights of way for all Forest & Forest Way users should aim to be minimal & non-intrusive; the facilities should not be sanitised or prettified to high levels

If most if not all the management of the ways & sites is kept in hose, I'm very much pro; the fewer private companies running public services, the better, I feel & the more accountability is retained in the public sphere

I do not support contracted-out services in most if not all cases; it is a licence to put profits first

I think it is important that the council works closely with farmers and land owners to ensure public rights of way remain accessible and do not get 'lost' or forgotten by being ploughed over or are blocked off by locked gates or become fenced off. (Now that smart phones are so widely used by the public it would be good to have an app that contains a map of the rights of way. Then when someone finds a problem with access to a path they can use the app to send the GPS coordinates of the path and even upload a photo of the problem).

When it comes to managing our countryside sites I think we need to consider how they can be linked together so that don't become isolated islands as this is likely to reduce their biodiversity.

I don't know till we know who will take over the running of Weir Wood Reservoir. I am a committee member of the Friends of Weir Wood.

I am particularly interested in the future of Weir Wood LNR (WWLNR). I do not know if your proposals are good or bad because I do not know the organisation that will take over the ESCC responsibilities. If the new organisation has good motives and resources - then your proposal should be good.

I have enjoyed visiting WWLNR for many years. I am a member of the Friends of WW Society. My husband is a member of the committee of the society and a regular member of the work parties at WW. We contribute a lot in terms of work and time. In return we receive benefits to our well being and the enjoyment of bird watching at WW.

I feel very strongly that WWLNR should be protected and developed. It will be a shame and a great loss if it is allowed to deteriorate.

We are willing to interact with you further as needed and to be part of the ongoing process. Please let us know how we can help.

In section 2, you mention an 'East Sussex visitor offer'. I don't know what this means so cannot comment.

In section 3, part of the vision is 'meeting and delivering the needs of our residents and visitors in the most efficient, affordable and effective manner.' I don't understand the difference between meeting and delivering. Efficiency, affordability and efficacy are like apple pie; everyone likes them. Such general terms are slippery and un-helpful.

In section 4 you set safety as number one. I'm always worried by a risk averse society. Getting outdoors is risky in itself. I value safe stiles and no bulls in fields but please leave room for risk taking.

In section 5 there was insufficient information to enable me to express a view about Countryside site management. More 'apple pie', I'm afraid.

I know the devil is in the detail but I really can't agree or disagree with such general statements.

I think the aim of maintaining the wildlife and ecology of the area should have a higher priority in the plan.

Yes. There should be three further commitments.

1 - Ensure that not a single metre of RoW is lost aside from say cliff falls. This means clearing away such things as mudslides etc. and reinstating paths.

2 - Enforce the requirement for farmers to keep footpaths navigable and accessible through crops and exits from fields not fenced off.

3 - Ensure that all stiles are kept in good order. At least 50% of those I have used this year are in a bad state of repair and unusable for the less able.

I would prefer if the country side management was dealt with in house as well. I don't believe that any outsourcing of services that benefit the public thrive when outsourced (see Southern Rail). I also think that there needs to be a balance between safety (obviously important) and possibility to make use of the country side for recreational and sports activities such as running, horse riding and mountain biking. These activities have proven health benefits both for mind and body and restricting them by overemphasising safety could have negative health effects on the public

Your survey is far too general in matters as important as the management of PROW and 'countryside sites'. The questions are too vague and general to enable any true response from the general public.

I would never support the management of Chailey Commons being passed from ESCC.

Managing a foot path is very different to Conservation work, especially in areas (in fact your biggest open space) like Chailey Common. The Common is both a SSSI & LNR, it currently benefits from Defra funding of over £34,000 and from LDC of £8,000. There is a significant HLS scheme run by ESCC which should NOT be put into private hands where profit will be sought to the detriment of the improvement of the Common.

Your own documents state that you already run one of the best departments in the south of England so why would you contract out such important work? Especially to someone who would see it as a money making opportunity. How & who would you police such a subcontractor? What happens if they walk away from the HLS.

ESCC have signed up to the HLS Scheme until 2021, so walking away from it now would raise questions as to whether this is just a poorly disguised spending cut and on your true intentions of delivering on the Scheme in house. Such a pity when the Ranger works hard to deliver to the HLS, and is very competent and qualified for the job.

More questions are raised by this survey that need very careful consideration. A 'one size fits all' approach is wholly inappropriate when looking at such diverse areas a PROW and larger Open Spaces.

The plan makes good sense, however in this times of limited public finance I am not clear how they can be funded to meet the aspirations. Even when funding was available some of the public rights of way in the region were poorly maintained and relationships with landowners could have produced safer walking routes.

Uckfield Town Council strongly agree that all rights of way should continue to be maintained by East Sussex County Council and should no be left to community groups, conservation groups etc. to maintain them on its behalf.

Would be concerned that responsibilities could be passed down to the Parish Council without corresponding funding

I have lived on Chailey Common for 20 years and the improvement recently under the Higher Level Stewardship grant has been very good. It would be crazy to further subcontract out the work already being carried out. There are no obvious cost savings or additional revenue sources. The responsibilities of managing the commons is already ambiguous enough as it is without adding another unnecessary layer of complexity.

The current poroposals give little detail about who or how a third party will manage the commons. What crieria will be used to ensure that the third party is fulfilling it obligations. I strongly oppose the proposal.

We believe that this is a very important document that ESCC should be held responsible to. In our response we have mainly referenced Public Rights of Way (PRoW) rather than the Countryside Sites, as these are of most relevance in Withyham parish.

Withyham Parish Council makes the following comments under section 5:

1. We support the Vision Statement

.2. It is pleasing to see ESCC Cabinet Members recognising their statutory duties relating to PRoW and very positive that ESCC are publicly admitting the benefits of our PRoW and their value to the county both environmentally and economically.

3. As the Forest Way is to continue to be managed in house by ESCC, the disposal of the management of the countryside sites does not directly affect Withyham. However, residents here may visit some of the other sites from time to time. It may be difficult to find bodies that have the necessary financial, environmental and social credentials to take on the sites that are not driven purely by profit. Any form of charging for entry to these sites would be unacceptable.

4. Raising parking charges may not increase Council revenues as much as forecasted. It may encourage people to find other ways to visit the countryside sites, which may be better environmentally.

5. Throughout the document there are quite detailed descriptions of what PRoWs are and who is responsible for them, plus useful explanations of terms, etc. that are helpful for the uninitiated.

6. ESCC finds difficulty in correlating financial value to the existence and use of PRoW. To help this ESCC should refer back to the minutes of the stakeholder meetings held in 2001 during the Foot & Mouth countryside shutdown, which made clear the substantial losses suffered by a wide range of businesses across the county.

7. The decision to keep RoW management 'in-house' is welcomed. Any prospect of contracting-out maintenance should be rejected, as the loss of the efficient in-house maintenance team with their very specific skill and relationship with landowners would be an issue.

8. There is only passing reference to ESCC's Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007-2017. The RoWIP is a comprehensive work containing input from stakeholders across the spectrum of access interests including parish councils, landowners and farmers, walkers, cyclists and riders.

9. In 'Strategic Outcome 4' on page 10 there is reference to greater use of volunteers. While this is to be welcomed and actively encouraged, past experience shows that the RoW team has a variable approach to volunteers being used for reporting and commenting on path obstructions (a very valuable role that saves RoW Officers many hours of work and miles travelled). There is scant mention of the Council resources that using of volunteers requires, but an annual plan is promised by spring next year so we look forward to that.

10. Pleased to note that the impending closure of the Definitive Map in 2026 is referred to in the Technical Appendix on page 28 with recognition of a probable rise in workload. The English Coastal Route is also mentioned, although not that Natural England is currently surveying Sussex.

11. Raising charges for path diversions sounds like a good idea, but it should not be seen as a source of revenue, as this could lead to diversions being processed for profit rather than user benefit. The public's right of objection to diversions is not mentioned, and where exercised can lead to public inquiries, etc., which consume large amounts of public funds and RoW officers' time. We must face the fact that many landowners who might wish for diversions have budgets that dwarf those of ESCC, and also be aware that last year's Deregulation Act is activating an existing right of appeal by landowners against refusal of diversions by Highway Authorities so they may find themselves with extra legal costs there too.

12. At the bottom of page 16 it states that the RoW Team received 3705 reports of path problems in 2014/15. It does not say how many were resolved.

13. On page 18, under 'Maintenance of PRoW.....' it states "We are proud to report that over 99% of our PRoW network is accessible by foot and 80% of the furniture is in a good condition." This fails to show the further links many of these obstructed paths make unusable, or the countless other paths blocked seasonally by crops, overgrowth, etc. that are never cleared. In 2013 the RoW Team and Ramblers agreed that barely 55% of the network was open and easy to use at any one time.

14. On page 37 are the PRoW budget cuts. Between 2010 and 2015 the experienced RoW Officer count has been reduced by 2, and now stands at 2 full time and 1 part time. This has resulted in, amongst other cuts, a "stricter prioritisation of enforcement work" which is in effect less enforcement work, arguably the most important function of the RoW Team in looking after our Rights of Way.

Conclusion

While there are many positive aspects to the Access Strategy, the major issues of funding and the ever-diminishing resources of the RoW Team are pointed out obliquely but not addressed. It does demonstrate the excellent work carried out by ESCC staff on the ground, but fails to address the work that they are unable to do due to resource constraints.

1. I would like to see some provision for equestrians. Perhaps more bridleways and where these paths meet roads, some horse box parking provided. Roads are increasingly more and more dangerous for riders, and it would be a good thing for the safety of car drivers as well as equestrians if there was more off-road riding available.

2. In some areas inside the South Downs Park, County Council management has not been very successful, and paths have deteriorated through lack of maintenance. If contractors were involved, the work could be overseen by the CC and the budget set apart for the work.

I spent a lot of time in the outdoors, across the UK, and have done for decades. Keeping fit in this way is an investment in my health that saves public expenditure on unhealthy populations and keeps me well and sane to continue to work hard for the NHS.

In many parts of the country, in the past year or so, there has been a really worrying decline in the maintenance of public rights of way - presumably due to the huge austerity pressures on local councils. I hope that in East Sussex, everything possible can be done to preserve the precious asset and inheritance of access to countryside

1) There has been an instance where a developer has encroached on the public right of way. On investigation was informed that the definitive map of the 1960's which detailed rights of way did not give widths only lines. This RoW is earmarked to be part of a future Bexhill Cycle Network. There needs to be a system where the Public Rights of Way are protected and where land is stolen every effort is made to reclaim the land that otherwise is forever lost.

2) New housing estates need to be connected, as far as possible to the existing Rights of Way network which should ideally then lead to countryside sites. There is a school of thought that cutting off access makes it safer as criminals cannot reach properties. This then contributes to an over reliance on motor transport as the only way out is the long way around. When walking or cycling with your own power the shortest, easiest route is the preferred option and should Authorities need to encourage developers to build accordingly.

3) Signing of RoW need to be clear and show a better option than using a car. eg: Bexhill, cycle 2mins or walk 5mins with symbols for cycle and walking.

4) There is already plenty of willing volunteers to maintain RoW and there are charities that support such schemes. This is something that can be developed and supported by ESCC.

User groups have urged ESCC for years to use smaller and local contractors who have a proven record in this area in order to reduce costs and raise standards of carrying our repair work. This has still not been put into effect thus spending large sums of money which could be saved and used elsewhere.

A far tougher line with recalcitrant landowners/farmers is often taken by other authorities and I consider that ESCC should do likewise. Parish Councils could and should also be prepared to take stronger action where it is within their remit to do so.

With regard to Chailey common it is vital that you engage local residents, those that access the commons daily, and pay council taxes in the parish, to present their opinions. Using websites, e-mail and modern methods may be acceptable but for many less 'tech aware' residents, a local meeting must be offered.

I am on the commons every day and was not aware of the possible changes until they were pointed out to me. Simply putting a notice on an information board is not enough. I am resident on the commons and access them every day but was blissfully unaware of any proposed changes.

This appears to be 'change by stealth'. Simply put, posting notices does not mean that the proposed changes have been effectively shared and notified.

- ESCC has worked hard in trying to maintain standards of maintenance along its RoW network in a difficult time of reducing budgets and resources, and has adapted to changing circumstances to enable 77% of the RoW to be open and accessible.
- We are glad to hear that management and maintenance of PRoW is being kept in-house. However, the draft Strategy gives no indication of the resources that will be available to the PRoW team to undertake this work. This is of concern as we are aware from information supplied to us by yourselves that there is a backlog of asset repair work to be carried out – for example on wayfinding signs – 23% missing or requiring attention. We urge ESCC to put in place measures to ensure that PRoW are adequately funded and that the quality of the access network does not suffer as a result of changes to the service.
- We agree that more should be made of volunteers – in particular training people to be path wardens. The South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service is already working with ESCC and coordinates a number of volunteer tasks on rights of way, particularly during the summer months. We would be keen to develop this aspect of our work further as it has always been a very popular aspect of the work of the VRS and we would want to do it in a way where there is some input from ESCC to help enhance the volunteer experience. There could be a dedicated group of the VRS which would become one of the volunteer groups which take responsibility for a parish or parishes through ESCC co-ordination.
- We are unclear about the wording of Outcome 1, which states that work will be externalised immediately if shown to be better value – what work is being referred to?
- We are unclear of the scale of potential charging which is suggested. Charging for diversions is not a dependable income source. We are concerned that in using diversions to generate income for the service there is a risk that income generation will be prioritised over the quality of the public's experience of the access network and that landowners' requirements will be met at the expense of the quality of PRoW in ESCC.

- We agree that a variety of groups/organisations could be appropriate to take on management of CMS however we are concerned about the wording in outcome 3, which states that by 'working to pass the sites to others.... We MAY improve what the countryside sites have to offer'. We would like to encourage ESCC to ensure that any potential handover will ensure that the sites are managed at least as well as now.

Dear East sussex

Please may i make a complaint about disabled wheelchair access onto the countryside.

I am talking about the ground surrounding the gate access.

The wheelchair does not go through any gates because the ground is too uneven.

simply make the 2 meters around the gates level is the answer - at many gates

i am not talking about the whole of the south downs, simply the 2 meters around each gate.

My sister is disabled and has not left the house for almost a year due to depression caused by her muscle wasting disease, i managed to get her out which has taken months of work, only to find there is not a gate the floor is level, so i could get her out the car as she does not feel safe on uneven ground in her wheelchair.

Please can you do something about this as a matter of urgency.

People so often forget the growing population of elderly, the large numbers of disabled - who have never seen the south downs - even though they live right beside it - because it is not accessible.

Use public rights of way to visit shops and make other essential journeys on foot, avoiding main roads without footpaths, in winter ice and snow conditions when unable to drive.

Our public rights of way are a precious natural resource especially in these times of unprecedented new development in the Wealden area in particular and it is imperative that the resources are found to keep them accessible and not just those listed as the most popular in this survey eg Cuckoo Trail. A legal right of way is meaningless if it is not kept accessible and given the fragmentation of land ownership now it appears more and more the case that landowners are not being made by ESCC to keep the access open and the vegetation at bay as required. The alternative is for ESCC to step in and clear the paths on a more regular rotation itselfEither way the position is not satisfactory at present and must be improved. Our rights of way whether for horse riders,walkers or where applicable cyclists are helping keep our residents fit both mentally and physically in addition to enabling a gateway to the appreciation and therefore the support of our precious countryside and wildlife for young and old alike.

I concur with the views expressed by the Sussex Ramblers Area Chairman. Further, I have concerns that the current experience of PRoWs is marred by lack of maintenance (including to signage) and problems of obstructions, which ESCC simply does not have the resources to resolve in any timely manner. The failure to implement the current ROWIP and no plan apparently to produce the new one is also a cause for concern. How are we to know what PRoW issues are planned to be addressed as a matter of strategy rather than just reactively, where public safety is at risk?

If access to countryside parks is outsourced, the priorities of the new managers may be disadvantageous to walkers seeking to use PRoWs within the areas, or there may be a need to create new PRoWs through the parks. This may particularly be true where wildlife trusts seek to restrict access to specific areas on conservation grounds.

I have spoken to members of the ESCC team regarding our 2026 lost ways project and also about trying to get more volunteers for path maintenance work. In both cases, current ESCC resources make these problematic. There are more than 90 parishes without a volunteer maintenance team - ESCC is likely to only be able to manage an additional 2 or 3 teams per 6 months. No ESCC resource has been identified for the lost ways project, which our early indications suggest could generate more than 300 cases.

East Sussex Area Footpath Secretary, Ramblers Association

I have read thoughtfully your document on Countryside Access Strategy; some of the analysis is certainly helpful, though the document often smacks of undue influence by PR considerations. I have understood, baldly stated, that the driver for the exercise is failing financial resources, to provide 'longterm protection from continued financial pressures'. Likely now with the consequences of the Referendum vote to increase yet further in the public sector. It would have been helpful for this key driver to have been more prominently indicated in your document.

My particular concern is Chailey Common, adjacent to where I live and which I have used in multiple ways for more than 30 years. Local engagement is strong and for many years has already been effective in those areas identified in your document. As a result the site is well defended by the strong 'proprietary' sentiment of local residents and a range of formal, semi-official and voluntary organisations relating to the well-being of the Commons, backed up - crucially - by the statutory and professional input of the Local Authority. This is seen as effective and I see no public need to change this management model; your proposal however would do precisely this, by removing the professional input of the Local Authority. According to your document, there is an intention to pass over the management of the site 'to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement' - thus in essence removing the professional backstop and transferring this role to the unpaid voluntary sector, with no doubt goodwill but aleatory professional competence and no established managerial framework to work within. Unlikely I'm afraid to maintain let alone enhance the present structures.

Could I add a request for an update on the likelihood of Chailey Commons achieving 'Countryside Stewardship' financial support from 2017 onwards? I have completed the questionnaire to the best of my ability, but have not given responses where information is sought about my sexual orientation, ethnic group and adherence to a belief system. I should be happy to do this once convinced by your proactive defence of the relevance of these issues to the management of PRoW and countryside sites in the county.

The countryside should be managed for benefit of community and the ecology - AND NOT BY COMMERCIAL OR SHORT-TERM INTERESTS.

I have a deep concern that this is a cost-cutting exercise and that the council is seeking to abrogate its community responsibility by trying to pass management to third parties with commercial interests.

This survey is poorly structured, and the vision and statements are shallow. They are not specific, nor are they objectively measurable. Consultation with the local communities has been poor, and clearly guided towards a preselected outcome.

The Council should be looking to provide leadership, direction and co-ordination with a view to both current and future generations. You should be seeking to collate the actual opinions of all interested parties, and then seeking efficient ways to implement them, or a framework within which the community can assist.

Passing these duties to other parties that have commercial interests is a dereliction of duty and will not lead to a good outcome for the community.

You mention the 10 sites but do not mention Ashdown Forest, which is the jewel in the crown.

Not sure how you will meet your aspirations within the austerity budget cut backs.

As a close resident and user of North Chailey Commons I am concerned at the suggestion that ESCC wishes to divest itself of responsibility for their management. The present system is effective and has led to considerable enhancement and improvement of both access and conservation of species. The long-term sustainability of these sites can only be guaranteed by public service management - no commercial or voluntary organisation can be relied on to future-proof the sites.

I support the proposals for Rights of Way, which will include the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way.

I do not support the proposal to dispose of the Countryside Sites as I feel the ROWCM has managed these well in recent years especially considering the efficiency savings made in the team.

Countryside sites are proposed to be offered to suitable third parties to manage, which may benefit some individual sites, but perhaps not be in the best interest of the sites overall. There is a danger that third parties may cherry pick the sites that have the most to offer (eg Seven Sisters, Ditchling Common) and still leave ESCC with the remaining sites and their management liabilities. This would leave the ROWCM team still needing staff to manage the remaining Countryside sites and only offer a small degree of savings.

A preferred option would be to require third parties to also take on the less desirable sites as part of the deal in any negotiations, and for these parties to be prepared to take on staff (TUPE) as part of the deal.

Whilst I fully agree with leaving the Management of Rights of Way largely unchanged, I do strongly disagree that changing the management of Countryside Sites is the right thing to do.

In these times of cuts and less money to spend, why is the County Council considering disposing of assets that could bring in a substantial amount of extra income? I don't think that the best is being made of these assets currently, but do think that there are many changes that could be implemented within ESCC management of sites that would not only enhance the experience of the public visiting sites, but also bring in extra income.

I have my doubts that external organisations would want to take on many of the sites, but with the inclusion of Seven Sisters in a package, it would make them seem more attractive. But this would be from an income generation point of view. If this is the case then why pass this income opportunity to an external organisation rather than making the most of the opportunities with ESCC.

Other Local Authorities are now investing in businesses and income generation schemes to offset cuts. Only last week there was a story of Sevenoaks Council (I think) buying and operating a petrol station to generate income.

If ESCC staff were given the opportunity and support to start generating a proper income from sites, and especially Seven Sisters, then I am convinced that more income could be generated which would help to off-set any future cuts that are likely to happen.

Looks good but best to avoid truisms and corporate gobbledegook like 'optimum'.

Am concerned that time and cash will be concentrated on places easy to look after and more remote areas neglected.

The plan is vague in presenting proposals.

The need for the County Council to manage rights of way in-hand is appropriate and we cannot anticipate this being achieved appropriately and the responsibilities for their management being met any other way.

Whilst the CLA supports the principle of improving processes for handling diversions as well as dealing with wider maintenance and enforcement issues, there does not seem to be any proposals for how this will be achieved and our concern would be that with restricted resources, this may not be achievable. We would welcome the opportunity to liaise directly on how this might be achieved in a more efficient manner for the benefit of all stakeholders.

It is in a landowners (including ESCC) interest to ensure that rights of way are maintained and correctly signposted to avoid mis-use and trespass. Landowners would on the whole be keen to work with the council to ensure that access to rights of way is clear, safe and enjoyable. Landowners do though, need to be given fair service in processing diversions and temporary closures where they are required in the interest of safety and ease of use.

In relation to the management of public open spaces, we do not object in principle to passing the management responsibility over to third-parties more experienced in managing these areas. There is though, no detail in the proposals outlining the type of third-party this would be. It must be recognised that the priority for these areas is the provision of open space free or at least cheap for members of the public to use - recognising the wider economic and health benefits of the provision of these facilities. They must not become a "cash generator".

We support the ability of the manager of these open spaces to apply for funding streams such as HLS, but we are concerned that following the UK's exit from the EU, these funding streams may become more constrained and as such alternative funding provision should be made.

The CLA considers that the provision of public open space free of charge is vital for the health and well-being of the community as well as providing green-space often in more urban

centres. The costs of providing these will undoubtedly be off-set by savings in other areas such as health-care, welfare and policing by providing safe places for people to play and exercise. Full consideration to these indirect benefits must be given. Additionally, provision of these spaces helps to relieve pressure on more sensitive areas and on private land.

To comment fully on this consultation, we would wish to see further details of the proposals.

I have great concerns that this is a way of selling off publicly owned land. We are clearly losing swathes of green areas to an ever increasing human population and the areas of countryside we do have **MUST** be protected at all costs. Whilst I realise that the areas involved in this particular project are protected they must be kept within public ownership, and not be put into the hands of 'stakeholders'. These areas do not 'belong' to any council, just managed by them as custodians, for all generations, current and future.

I fully understand that the strategy (although it appears to be referred to here as a plan?) is a pragmatic and necessary statement of where your PROW and countryside service is today in regards to its funding and future. i.e. a recognition of decreased resources in a different financial climate to the original ROWIP and change is obviously needed and inevitable. (I'm presuming that the strategy/plan is in effect the successor to the first ROWIP?)

The strategy is an up-to-date statement of the need for that change and seeks to justify the importance of PROW and countryside sites whilst introducing a reduced pared-down delivery model - presumably with less maintenance, funding, and a presumably reduced scope for improvements as compared to the original ROWIP?

The strategy justifies the need for its approach, and is a necessary document to protect your assets and resources, but it reads very much as a policy document and I wonder how readable it is to the general public who might want a simpler statement of what's happening where and when as in the original ROWIP or action plan? Is there an intention to produce a revised plan/statement of actions?

Economic justification is obviously a key factor in bidding for resources and the benefits of PROW and recreation in general are mentioned in the strategy albeit with the proviso that its difficult to pin down the exact contribution of PROW. There is evidence available for this if you need it e.g. nationally in the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), which can give more specific regional data, and various other research that specifically looks at PROW and recreation benefits so perhaps you could be more robust in promoting the benefits?. The original ROWIP also mentioned your Paths to Prosperity Initiative - did that produce local data?

Various strategies mentioned in the previous ROWIP are not mentioned h eg the cycling and walking strategies, - are they still operational or have they been rationalised into this strategy?

The 'need' statement focusses on active lifestyles which is welcome, but there isn't much mention of the needs of different users including less mobile people. An Equalities Impact Survey is mentioned but there is little specific mention of needs of people with restricted mobility

The commitment to processing landowner diversions is practical since it generates income but there is no corresponding mention of public applications - something that needs to be addressed with 2020 cut-off and the implementation of the Deregulation Act measures?

I didn't see any statement about future management of the South Downs National Trail - is it covered by this strategy?

I've seen the consultation doc sent out to stakeholders which gave them a good opportunity to comment on the strategy. + current management of PROW and sites. References to the Local Access Forum are few in the main doc - were they specifically consulted about this strategy?

East Sussex County Council has a successful track record of environmental improvement and biodiversity gain on its Countryside Sites. Therefore any organisation taking on the responsibility of a Countryside Site should have a proven track record of managing and restoring important wildlife habitats, especially where sites have a statutory designation e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest or Local Wildlife Site. They should also be able to ensure the long term funding of agreed ecological management plans.

There should be a strong management focus on safety and public access and community engagement, but where a countryside site is recognised as important for wildlife habitat or species presence the management should primarily be to protect and enhance the wildlife value. For example, a number of County owned Countryside Sites are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and as such the management of these sites should have a primary focus of ensuring the SSSI is categorised as in 'Favourable Condition' above anything else, or that restoration is working towards meeting that category criteria. To prevent risk of degradation of a SSSI a management plan (agreed with Natural England) and secured resources and funding should be identified and committed before allowing another organisation to lead on management. East Sussex County Council should ultimately be prepared to except responsibility for the degradation for a SSSI if it is shown that the management of the site has been devolved irresponsibly. I would suggest that, on the panel that makes the final decision on who manages the Countryside Site, there should be an independent member from a leading conservation organisation. This member should be able to comment on whether the organisation applying to take on the management of the site, is competent to take on the responsibility of enhancing and protecting the biodiversity value of the land.

Community Engagement should be an integral part of managing the Countryside Sites. But again, where the value of the site is in its habitats and wildlife, all engagement that takes place should be focused on raising awareness of this and the wider conservation issues. Any event should have no negative impact on wildlife or habitats.

It is of upmost importance that Countryside Sites are not managed in isolation but as part of a wider living landscape and ecological unit. Any new manager should be prepared to look beyond the boundary of the site to work in partnership with other likeminded organisations and stakeholders.

Finally, Lewes District Council should be formally consulted with over sites where they are actively involved. This includes the Chailey Commons where Lewes District Council are responsible for the Scheme of Regulation and Riverside Park where Lewes District Council own part of the site.

I think that this questionnaire is flawed as the questions don't truly reflect the content of the document. Specifically question 3 speaks of "... optimal management of our public rights of way and countryside sites for benefits of residents, visitors ..." then question 4 says "working with partners ..." while the document talks of "We can therefore consider passing the sites to others more experienced in community involvement, conservation and visitor engagement" which is clearly a much bigger step. It is unclear what "passing" means – in my mind it means sale or gift but perhaps the council have something other in mind. The document does not say. At best the questionnaire is unclear, at worst it is misleading. Also question 3 mixes the fate of the Countryside sites with Rights of Way, which the council intend to treat in two entirely different ways.

Question 1: We should consider the ways that Rights of Way are part of the travel network. Being able to use Rights of Way to cut between roads, stations etc. enables people to avoid going round "three sides of a square" in their cars. This takes traffic off the roads with obvious benefits.

Question 3: I have marked down safety because safety should not be used as an excuse for closing Rights of Way or putting up ugly fences and signs or obtrusive lighting. People using a Right of Way can reasonably be expected to put on sturdy shoes and carry a torch. Obviously stiles, boardwalks etc. should be kept in good repair.

I am concerned about the Council's enthusiasm for Right of Way diversions. For me the whole point is they the (often historic) routes are direct ways of getting from this place to that, which is defeated if they are heavily diverted. Round a field edge is fine, much more than this is not.

At a meeting of the East Dean & Friston Rights of Way Committee on 19th July 2016, the following responses were made to the Countryside Access Strategy consultation:

1. County Cllr Shing has advised that as a consequence of the proposed Strategy the parking charges at Butchershole car park might be increased. Is this correct, and if so what would the new charges be?
2. All parishes were originally invited to contribute to the consultations which preceded the drafting of the Strategy, and East Dean & Friston sent their clerk to a liaison meeting at County Hall attended by representatives of a number of parishes, and of the Ramblers' Association. All the representatives urged the County Council to permit towns and parishes to take some direct action to repair paths, signs, etc. on behalf of the County, comparable to the new arrangements for parishes to assist county with verge cutting under the provisions of the Localism Act. It is disappointing to see that this is barely reflected in the Strategy. Without further detail, it is hard to comment on whether the methods outlined in Q.5 above will achieve the laudable stated outcomes, or whether the parish council should offer to take on a 'countryside site' (Q.10)

The vision could include appropriate in the statement

Continued consultation with residents and partners

The in house staff are better equipped to deal with the locations as they are aware of local issues

Funds should be managed to ensure that the rights of way are not overlooked and are maintained regularly.

Community involvement should be encouraged using the links with the schools, youth groups and volunteer section.

106 agreements and CiL should be utilised to ensure that the funds are available to fulfill the vision statement.

Parish Councils should be consulted with regarding the possibility of taking on and helping maintain the rights of way in villages.

Yes.

Regarding question 3 ("To ensure that our public rights of way and countryside sites are accessible, maintained, enhanced and promoted; meeting and delivering the needs of our residents and visitors in the most efficient, affordable and effective manner." How strongly do you agree that this vision reflects how public rights of way and countryside sites should be managed in the future?):

I would be concerned if PROW and Countryside Management were stripped of resources through cost saving exercises past a point where basic statutory requirements are met (e.g. obligations for management of condition of SSSIs, S41 NERC Act requirements). I would hope these obligations and statutory functions are at the forefront of decision making.

Regarding the preamble to and question 5 ("We believe that, by changing how the countryside sites are managed, we may be able to improve how effectively we are able to meet need and utilise our assets appropriately. By working with partners experienced in community engagement, conservation and visitor experience we hope to improve what the sites have to offer across all three areas of health and wellbeing, conservation and sustainable economy. If we are able to enhance their financial management they will also have long term protection from the continued financial difficulties all organisations are experiencing." 5 How strongly do you agree that these methods will benefit how we manage public rights of way and countryside sites?):

This is not plain English and is very confusing terminology for general members of the public!. Are you saying internal ESCC Countryside Management Services are to be removed or contracted out? If so, say it! These 'methods' are not explicit, so leaves a very vague question open to different interpretation hence my answer of 'don't know'. I don't know what you mean.

Safer access to the countryside – To enable older people to make better use of the ESCC PRoW network, there needs to be a programme for replacing styles with gates.

Liaison, and working with, local groups and volunteers – This really is essential if the County Council’s vision for countryside access is to be effectively achieved within the costs constraints that are being experienced.

The ESCC PRoW Network needs to be developed rather than just maintained - it is our legacy to today’s children - The County Council must be proactive in developing the network in response to the building development planned/taking place on green field sites within the County. This is to ensure that paths without a formal status, which have been used by residents for many years, become PRoW in their own right and are not lost when the development takes place (as has already happened). This is in the interest of the community as a whole – to new residents moving into the area as well as those already there.

‘Hiving off’ of Countryside sites – Where this does occur, ESCC must retain a management overview and influence (representation on the management board) on the countryside sites that are passed onto third parties. This is essential to ensure that these sites are managed and developed in accordance with their original charter.

Re-routing of PRoW – Whilst the County Council must deal dispassionately with requests from landowners for the re-routing of PRoW, it has to be recognised that they are PUBLIC Rights of Way and thus the wider interests of the community must be considered. Whereas the land owner may be only considering things in their own interest and may well have purchased the land knowing of the existence of the PRoW.

Care needs to be take to ensure that works carried out do not turn the area into a semi-urban park and thereby destroy the very wildlife one is trying to preserve.

On behalf of Bricycles, (Brighton and Hove Cycling Campaign) and as a Cycling UK campaigner for Brighton and Hove, I am responding to the above consultation. I will also send these comments as a letter.

Brighton and Hove is a small authority and most of our members also cycle into East Sussex throughout the year for business or pleasure. They enjoy the rural landscape, the comparative tranquillity, the stately homes and castles, the pubs and the tea rooms. East Sussex Public Rights of Way are extremely attractive and well used by cyclists where access is possible and the route is maintained. Most of the 10 countryside sites named in the plan are familiar destinations for leisure rides.

The strategy cites several of the growing number of known benefits of physical activity, to which can also be added reducing overweight and obesity (which I did not see mentioned). I also did not see a reference to the enormous public health issue of dangerously poor air quality caused by the overuse of motor vehicles with resulting toxic emissions, leading to premature death and illness. Air quality needs to be taken very seriously, and road traffic needs to be urgently reduced. Alternatives i.e. walking cycling, and public transport, and other sustainable modes of travel need to be encouraged at every opportunity.

The consultation includes a preferred alternative model of financial management for countryside sites which would perhaps be better addressed in a single section focused on this alone.

The strategy is aimed at dividing up the management of routes and destinations, but a holistic approach needs to be taken in terms of health, transport, planning and ecology etc. We would like to see a stronger statement about retaining rural character, biodiversity and prioritising access by sustainable transport.

Many of our members would access the 10 countryside sites totally by cycling or by a combined bike/rail journey. Our access to sites and the countryside is jeopardised by increased traffic on local roads. We would like to see a clear statement about road traffic reduction which would also speak to other departments in ESCC so that there would be a positive approach in all departments to promote sustainable transport.

More frequent, reliable bus and train services are needed to get people from urban centres to countryside destinations, particularly when walking and cycling are not practical choices. We are familiar with the no. 12, 28 and 29 buses from the Brighton & Hove Bus & Coach Company that provide an excellent service. Other services in rural East Sussex are limited and good information about timetables at weekends etc. is often difficult to obtain.

In terms of maintaining countryside sites and access, a case in point is ESCC's recent dismal development of Combe Haven Valley. This has been a very negative experience. Not only has a road been put through a previously tranquil valley and countryside park, but the "Greenway" cycle route remains unfinished, inadequately signed and not a practical cycling route for many people due to the gradient and surface. It remains a puzzle as to how the ordinary cyclist would access this "Greenway". The cycle route ends with a choice of a footpath (where there is 'no cycling') or returning to the road to Hastings which eventually becomes very busy. Features in the original Greenway design were dropped by ESCC in a despicable move. Motor traffic has been prioritised on "Combe Valley Way": there are no cycle lanes or Advanced Stop Lines. At the same time, the ESCC claims there is no money for any significant improvements for cycling infrastructure.

Bricycles supports a switch from big road schemes to more rewarding investment of walking, cycling and public transport. The economic return on roads is exaggerated. The benefits of walking and cycling are often underestimated. Research commissioned by CTC (now Cycling UK) shows that cycling could provide economic benefits worth £248 billion between now and 2050 if England meets the targets for increased cycle use as proposed in the parliamentary 'Get Britain Cycling' report.

See: http://www.cyclinguk.org/sites/default/files/economic_cycle_exec_summary.pdf

A point about access is that we are often caught out by roadworks where for example the Cuckoo Trail (or any cycling route) becomes suddenly closed but there is no signage at an early enough point for cyclists to take an alternative route.

We were recently surprised and disappointed to see that a large area of tarmac was laid at the top of Ditchling Beacon. Although the original plan was described as necessary for a bus turning circle, it has been accompanied by a sizeable car park, thus attracting yet more cars onto rural roads with all the accompanying negative effects that motor traffic brings. It is totally inappropriate for this beauty spot, and it's difficult to see why it was given planning permission.

We would not support the out-sourcing of countryside attractions to independent management if the result is more car parks. The disbenefits of more motor traffic, particularly the deterrent effect on walkers/cyclists and the degradation of the environment hugely outweighs any income generated.

The progress of the Egrets Way from Lewes to Newhaven is frustratingly slow. When built, it will provide a very useful route for walkers and cyclists as an alternative to the C7 where drivers are extremely inconsiderate to vulnerable road users. It would enable tourists to come from France and cycle to Lewes from the ferry terminal.

It is essential that good walking, cycling and bus routes are built in to all residential and commercial developments.

Though this is a national issue, we would like to state our preference to see footpaths opened to cyclists. Much of the ordinary road network is now too dangerous to enable the ordinary cyclist to get from A to B. In Scotland, the Scottish Land Reform Act (2003) has proven that responsible access by people on bikes is highly beneficial to tourism, health and the economy. Research has shown that mountain biking grew by up to 10% from 2011 to 2014 and is worth £49.5 million per year to the Scottish economy. See <http://bit.ly/2aDQAG0>

Thank you very much for the opportunity to put our views.

It is rightly recognised that well-managed Rights-of-Way and Countryside sites benefit users' health and well-being, and the local economy. This became particularly clear during the closures in 2001. If Government and ESCC targets for walking and exercise in the country are to be met, then these plans must be provided with adequate resources, both human and financial. Recent severe budget cuts have had a detrimental effect on Countryside and RoW management which MUST be restored. In order to achieve this, it may be necessary to seek additional help from volunteers and sponsorship/lottery sources.

The strategy is in principle fine; However there are some areas which need more detail or where there could be concern. I am commenting as a member of the Southdowns Local Access Forum.

- There is no mention of how maintenance of PRowWs will be prioritised, or how SLAs will be defined

- It has been said that ESCC may divest some of the countryside sites. This would seem to be the wrong approach for several reasons including the probability that the value released will be small and that control will be lost. Careful franchising, contracting or hiring out of parts of the sites would seem to be a better approach.

Nothing to add at this stage

I occasionally use the Cuckoo Trail and Forest Way Country Park as a cyclist. These routes are well signposted and well used although sometimes not adequately maintained - overgrowing hedgerows etc - although Sustrans volunteers do their best. Access is good with local stations.

Longer distance trails - 1066, High Weald are also well signposted. More money needs to be allocated by central government to allow ESCC to manage and develop their sites. ESCC used to have a cycling officer - it would good to see this position reinstated working in conjunction with local and national organisations such as Cycling UK and Sustrans.

It must not be forgotten that the countryside is a work place e.g. farmers. Their livelihood must not be interfered with.

Landowners and farmers must come first.

The Cuckoo Trail needs trimming back. I know about birds nesting etc but the area between Polegate and the Horsham road is very badly overgrown. School lane end is bad.

I think that safety should come first in how we look after public rights of way i.e. cyclists should slow down and use the bells on their bikes and be more careful about how close they ride to walkers. Some ladies have been bumped in to and hurt by riders. They go too fast and frighten the dogs they should take more care. Little children and older people have a right to feel safe when they use the trail. In the woods and forest stick to big path ways in winter. Maybe a person could walk the trails to see how people behave and see what happens so they can see how to tackle the problem. People should not feel threatened. Some of the stiles need repairing they are not safe to use.

We need to protect these sites for future generations - our children and theirs need to have the benefit and enjoyment that we have had from the countryside. Not about the money.

I would like to see the footpaths maintained and the stiles repaired and replaced as necessary. Some become quite unsafe to use.

There should be more emphasis on the protection and conservation of wildlife, not just for the benefit of residents and visitors. By working with third sector organisations such as my own charity, Seahaven Wildlife Rescue, more effective and responsive wildlife protection schemes can be implemented.

Better communication with voluntary groups working to keep clear footpaths, mend stiles, repair erosion areas etc.

Ragwort - I have never seen so much ragwort which is acknowledged as a poisonous plant on the sides of our roads and in many fields. Please ensure that the sites now referred to are free of this poisonous weed - gloves are recommended before the weed is pulled!

Byways - we have a byway crossing our land and a winter closure order has been agreed with the County Council. These rights of way were never intended for cross country vehicles or motor-bicycles and have been seriously damaged by careless vandals. This is an on-going problem in our wonderful landscapes and country.

Conservation and enhancement of the environment need to be a priority. To meet this then you need to be aware of what species are at a site and whether the current management is appropriate. It is therefore essential that an organisation with the appropriate skills base is involved. Finance should not override this need especially at important sites. Sussex Wildlife Trust should at least be consulted for site assessment as this organisation has the skills base to assess and advise on sites.

The public rights of way and countryside sites are very important for maintaining physical and mental health. I regularly walk in the Seven Sisters Country Park and cycle in the Ouse Estuary Nature Reserve. It is wonderful to see the wildlife there.

That they are regularly maintained and inspected, that areas will be kept tidy and rubbish free.

Thank you for all that has been already done and for putting this survey out. We will need to be good stewards of the land in which we live. I will look out for updates.

It is important to safeguard the countryside sites themselves, especially given what might be expected to be continuing demands placed upon them or indeed for them. I am particularly talking about the preservation of the number of sites and their size, especially where such assets have a disposable value, perhaps as a result of future development value. Perhaps there ought to be a policy on the retention of community land to safeguard its future accessibility?

Whichever organisation takes over the management of the Seven Sisters Country Park, it will have to be professional and have a deep understanding of the countryside and its management. One national organisation, The National Trust and one local organisation, The Wildlife Trust come to mind.

My wife and I have been volunteer rangers in the Seven Sisters Country Park Visitor Centre for the past 17 years. We have now worked there under three organisations; The South Downs Conservation Board, the Joint Committee and latterly the East Sussex County Council.

Under the first two organisations the park and visitor centre were poorly funded. It was almost the 'Cinderella' of the Sussex coast. Since being taken over by ESCC it has received a considerable amount of new funding making it 'a jewel in the Sussex crown'. It is hoped that any organisation taking over its future management will continue the outstanding work done since coming into the county's domain.

Thank you for the chance to comment on this very important work. I do not agree that countryside sites should be 'sold off' to other groups and should be protected by ESCC for the reason given in Q1 and 2.

Working with partners to enhance conservation and visitor experience is different and to be welcomed but passing responsibility for these sites is unacceptable.

These sites should be maintained for conservation value in the first instance with 'enjoyment' a second concern and creating 'park' or 'amusement centres' a definite no go.

My worry when using public rights of way is when the Ordnance Survey map shows an obvious right of way, which the landowner blocks with an obvious way into a field, for example, but the exit is no more; as in just before you come into Icklesham from the North West 1066 path, or on the path (smaller) to the West of Battle. Yet some landowners make serious efforts to ensure walkers know which way to walk, e.g. from Winchelsea to Icklesham.

The plan should therefore include a determination to ensure landowners/farmers allow and encourage public rights of way. Many thanks.

Too vague - need specifics to be mentioned, examples etc.

Form unnecessarily large and most of it twaddle e.g. Q25 and Q24 should have 'straight' as first, and others all as 'other' Q16!! Waste of money.

Please make pathways for pushchairs and wheelchair users. Say a circle of pathway on part of a heathland or woodland with a log sit along the way!

Public rights of way should not be allowed to change without ample warning and publicity.

It was good that you carried out this exercise and consulted widely. With regards to RoW it may be better if these are managed within the national park by the SDNPA. More generally they key point will be that the service should be adequately resourced, the website fit for purpose and the handling of faults, closures, diversions, creations etc be prompt and efficient and transparent.

With regard to countryside sites, other organisations may be well placed to take over but public and voluntary sector organisations may struggle to find the resources. Any transfer needs to protect landscape, wildlife, archaeology and access and build in potential for improvement. SDNPA may be an appropriate owner manager for Seven Sisters Country Park.

Essential to maintain finger post direction signs which are typical for the district as well as waymarkers for footpaths.

It would be better not to 'over manage' some public rights of way. British wildlife is after all is said and done 'wild'.

As a volunteer for the south downs national park I have noticed over the last few years a great deterioration of public rights of way / access. Many routes gradually becoming overgrown and when we as the public report such incidences nothing is done. Volunteers are asked to do more and more of the heavy work i.e. replacing post and rail and other types of fencing, a task more suitable to paid workers as the work is extremely tough.

When walking the parish boundaries many paths are almost completely overgrown, stiles need replacing and finger posts are either rotting or almost illegible.

Please do not use narrow stiles - it is very difficult for short people. Sometimes I have had to strip down to get through and also are impassable for people with push chairs, children and dogs. The new style metal swing gates are better for everyone.

The council do a really good job of managing countryside access within their resources, it would be a shame if countryside management changes jeopardised this.

I agree with the general premise of these proposals, however I have a concern about the way in which cycle paths have come to dominate our landscape. I am not certain what effect it has on existing wildlife but being an avid walker it spoils the enjoyment of walking along rivers etc for me. It turns country walking into road walking for me.

1. The report is inconclusive regarding the management of Chailey Common and clarification is needed as to whether the status quo will be maintained or if a new partner would assume responsibility for management.
2. As an LNR and SSI the Common enjoys an HLS agreement to 2021 which is working well and any suggested change in management would be detrimental. The Common is shortly due to be surveyed to gauge its condition and comment on the effectiveness of the grazing regime.
3. The common is one of the largest sites of lowland heath in South East England and as such conservation is the prime objective as opposed to recreation, notwithstanding the importance of the latter. Any change in management driven by financial considerations may well jeopardise this. Furthermore the report highlights the present ESCC arrangement as being cost competitive.
4. There is no prospect of enhancing managing the Common for further financial benefit and so there is no advantage to a potential new partner.
5. As regards conservation the Chailey Commons Society is a prime source of information on the flora, fauna and wildlife and as such should have an important role in the on going management decision.
6. The landowners have not been consulted and if a new partner is introduced there are serious concerns to be addressed, for example the maintenance of the fence and accompanying legal liability which is currently the responsibility of the ESCC, would pro forma accounts be produced as part of the process and arrangements for the on going HLS and future relationships with Natural England.
7. The survey is bland and fails to recognise the Common is a special case and cannot be sensibly compared to other sites in the report.
8. The report is silent on LDC's legal responsibility under the 1915 Scheme of Management and needs to be addressed as part of an on going decision.

Please ensure we don't lose any of the countryside we have left in Sussex as we have lost enough of the free and beautiful un-touched land around Hastings and Saint Leonards-on-Sea after protesting and being completely ignored while having our council tax payments increased with less access to sites of AONB and SSI usually in the countryside and as a community it was wrong to that to us.

Many public footpaths in rural areas are overgrown, with many nettles and brambles, which make walking difficult. Can we envisage with voluntary groups, community groups, charities, conservation volunteers, offering outdoor physical exercise to help maintain and clear paths? Prisoners from Lewes prison?

Provide recycling bins in car parks to try and discourage litter and random throwing of drink bottles?

Regarding the vision statement - this is not clearly spelt out by what is meant by 'efficient affordable and effective'. I am concerned that 'affordable' could be used as an excuse for cutting costs and corners or doing nothing.

The 'vision' should also mention conservation of the environment and its creatures etc.

The questionnaire is confusing because the questions couple rights of way with countryside sites. These are two quite separate issues. I would answer differently for each issue but am not given the option in the questions.

In the 'vision' statement the word 'needs' should be replaced by 'wishes'. The public does not know what it needs. I have no knowledge of countryside sites but have knowledge and

much experience of public rights of way from 1960 to 2016.

The most important constraint is not dealt with in this document. This is finance. Rights of way matters are understandably of low priority in ESCC. Children and elderly matters take most of ESCC income and rights of way resources are steadily reduced. Without consideration of resource availability the policy statements are meaningless.

No mention made as to how the strategic plan meshes in with those areas covered by the National Park Authority.

A bigger promotion should be applied to preventing dog fouling - especially areas within 100-200 yards of where people can park their cars. Perhaps along the lines of: 'leaving your dogs poo - whether in or not in a bag is litter. Please leave the countryside in a condition for our people to enjoy'.

I think it is important to ensure that any rights of way that are blocked by landowners are swiftly dealt with as it is difficult to find attractive routes if faced with a barrier.

To co-operate and work closely with the 'Friends of Riverside Park (Newhaven)' Group

More cycle paths and more bridleways for horses.

Rights of way / sites must be kept under control. My local areas are far past being able to walk them. Overgrown and dangerous. Local councils not a responsible unit to control areas. Don't even keep control of town areas! Don't pass the buck to a group that doesn't have any idea how to go about it.

I feel that definite use should be made of open countryside sites such as seven sisters park to attract the 'average' tourist who does not travel far from a car park/toilet to channel use and reduce pressure on other habitat areas.

I also believe strongly that while public access is an asset and (hopefully) educates people to the countryside and its nature, 'no go' areas are often the best for wildlife with carefully managed habitats of minimal intervention, and these areas should be considered as part of the plans.

Any public right of way is essential for the well being of all and should be encouraged.

As long as the community, safety and conservation is at the heart of the proposals, I'm in favour. What concerns me sometimes, are the behaviour and motives of private companies delivering services on these sites. Profit motivates companies more often than services. Also, ensuring that community well being is at the centre of their services rather than profit gain can be difficult for private companies.

Need to allocate increased funds and more personnel to improve current inadequate levels of RoW maintenance.

The conservation and enhancement of the whole countryside is paramount and far more important than any economical or employment consideration.

East Sussex rights of way are outstandingly well maintained at present. They are a wonderful resource for the community and it is vital to continue to support them in-house at a time when profound change to the proportion of built up land use is envisaged for many parts of the region.

For the same reason I would support continuity of management for the countryside sites. Their planning and maintenance cannot be separated off from that of rights of way.

1. Not to waste resources financially and time by unnecessary procedures and meeting to achieve your aims.

2. To protect public rights of way and countryside sites from additional noise pollution from that which already exists. These areas will only work for the health and wellbeing of people and certain wildlife if they are protected from the pressures of modern living and commercial enterprises.