

4 Current access provision - what have we got?

4.1 The rights of way network

- 4.1.1 There are over 4,000 kilometres (2,500 miles) of public rights of way in West Sussex, which include footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic (BOATs). This network enables people to experience and enjoy the outdoors whilst at the same time providing an alternative to pavements in more urban areas. All public rights of way are highways in law.
- 4.1.2 Restricted byways came into being when Sections 47-51 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 were enacted, on 2 May 2006, re-designating paths recorded as roads used as public paths (RUPPs). The public has no right to take a mechanically propelled vehicle along a restricted byway.

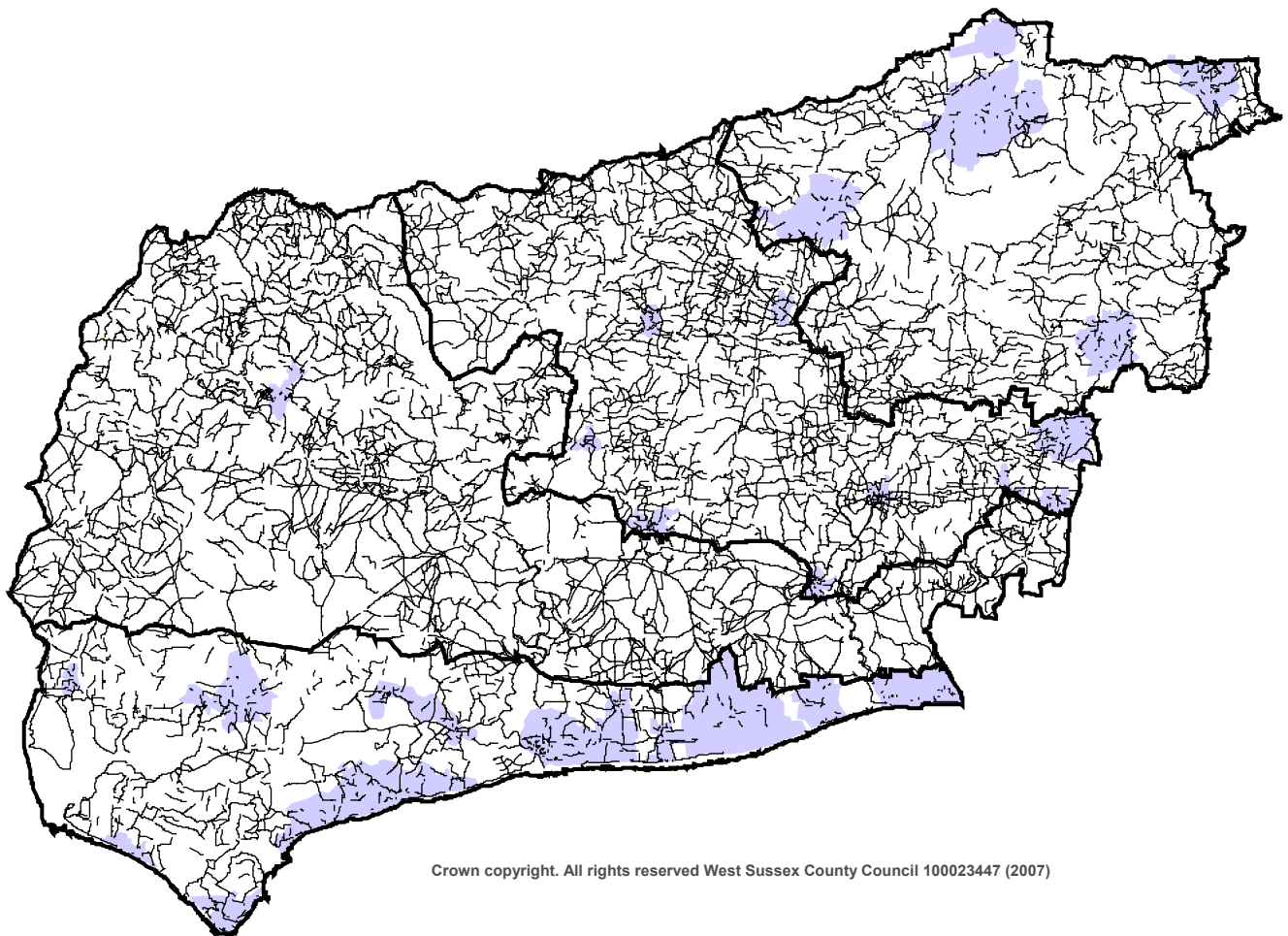


Figure 3. The rights of way network

- 4.1.3 Figure 3 shows the entire public rights of way network in West Sussex as recorded on the Definitive Map, the legal record of public rights of way, in November 2007. Rights of way can also be viewed using WSCC's web-based map (www.westsussex.gov.uk/imap). Figure 3 also shows the boundaries of the landscape areas.
- 4.1.4 Generally the coverage of rights of way network across the county is good, with a few notable exceptions, including an area to the south of Crawley in the north east of the county, together with some patchy coverage around Chichester in the south west. The fragmentation of the network exists in many places.
- 4.1.5 Deeper analysis of the rights of way network identifies that the Low Weald has the highest density of path, but here, like elsewhere in the county, local fragmentation and severance is a problem, making continuous safe routes often difficult to find.

Right of way type	Permitted use	Kilo-metres	Miles
Footpath	On foot only	2,742	1,714
Bridleway	On foot, horseback and bicycle	1,151	719
Restricted byway	On foot, horseback, bicycle and horse-drawn carriage	132	83
BOAT	On foot, horseback, bicycle, horse-drawn carriage and motor vehicle	10	6
Total		4,035	2,522

Table 1. Length of right of way by type (November 2007)

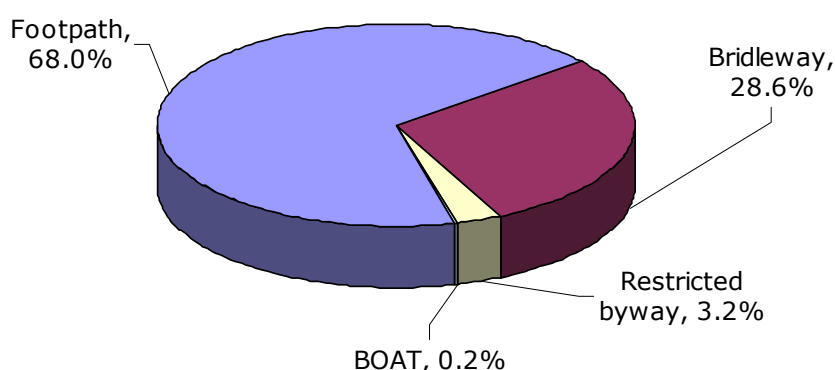


Figure 4. Types of right of way as a percentage of the whole network

- 4.1.6 The table and figure above show the lengths of the different classes of rights of way. Figures 5 to 8 on the following pages show the distribution of each of these path types.

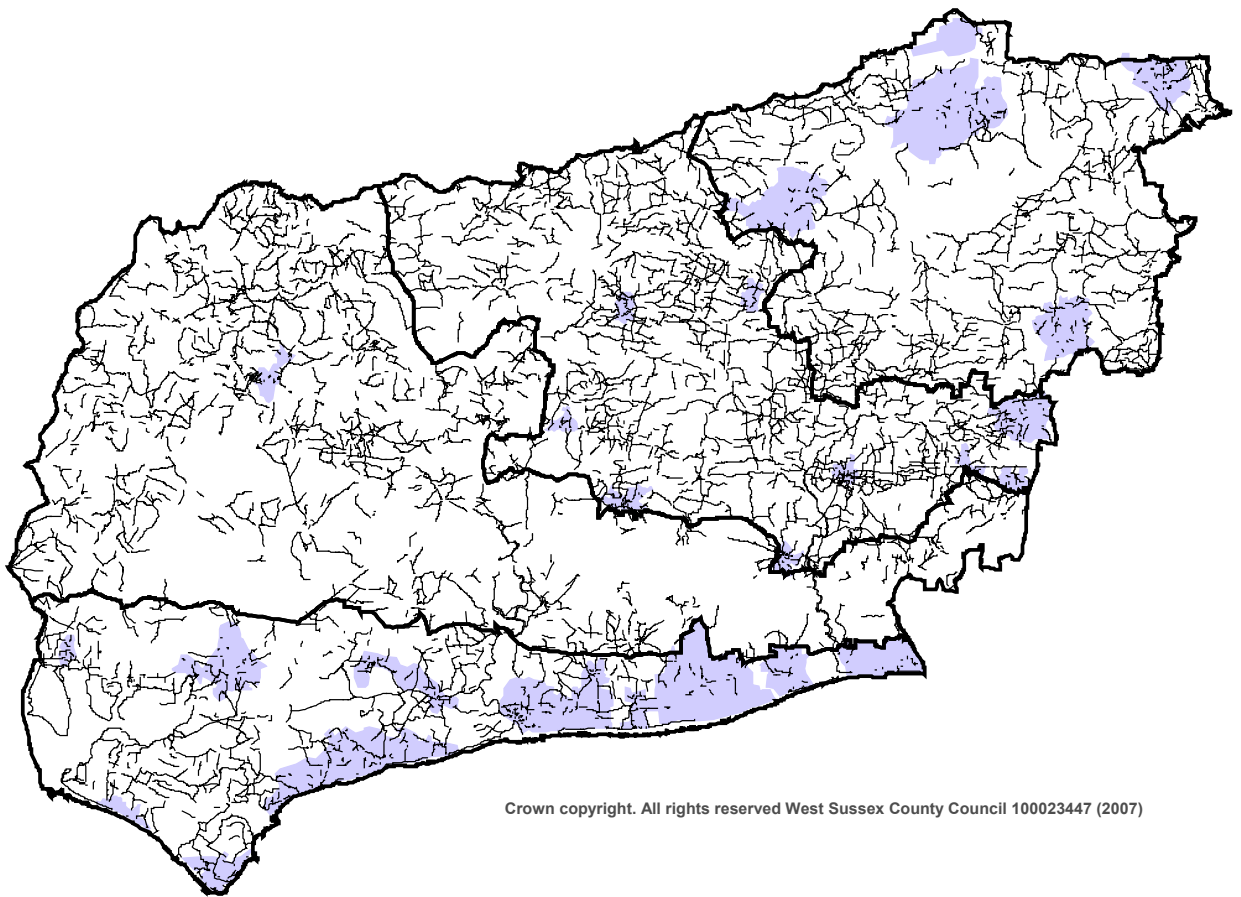


Figure 5. The footpath network

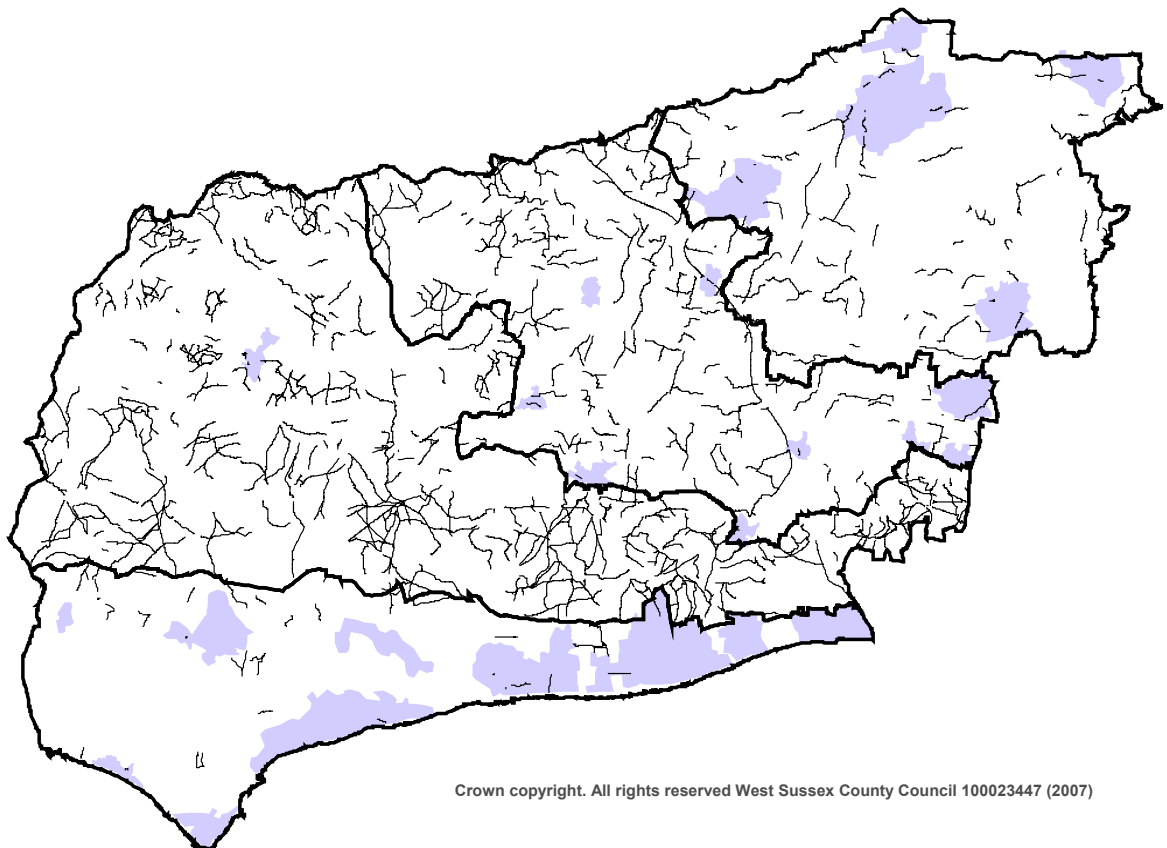


Figure 6. The bridleway network

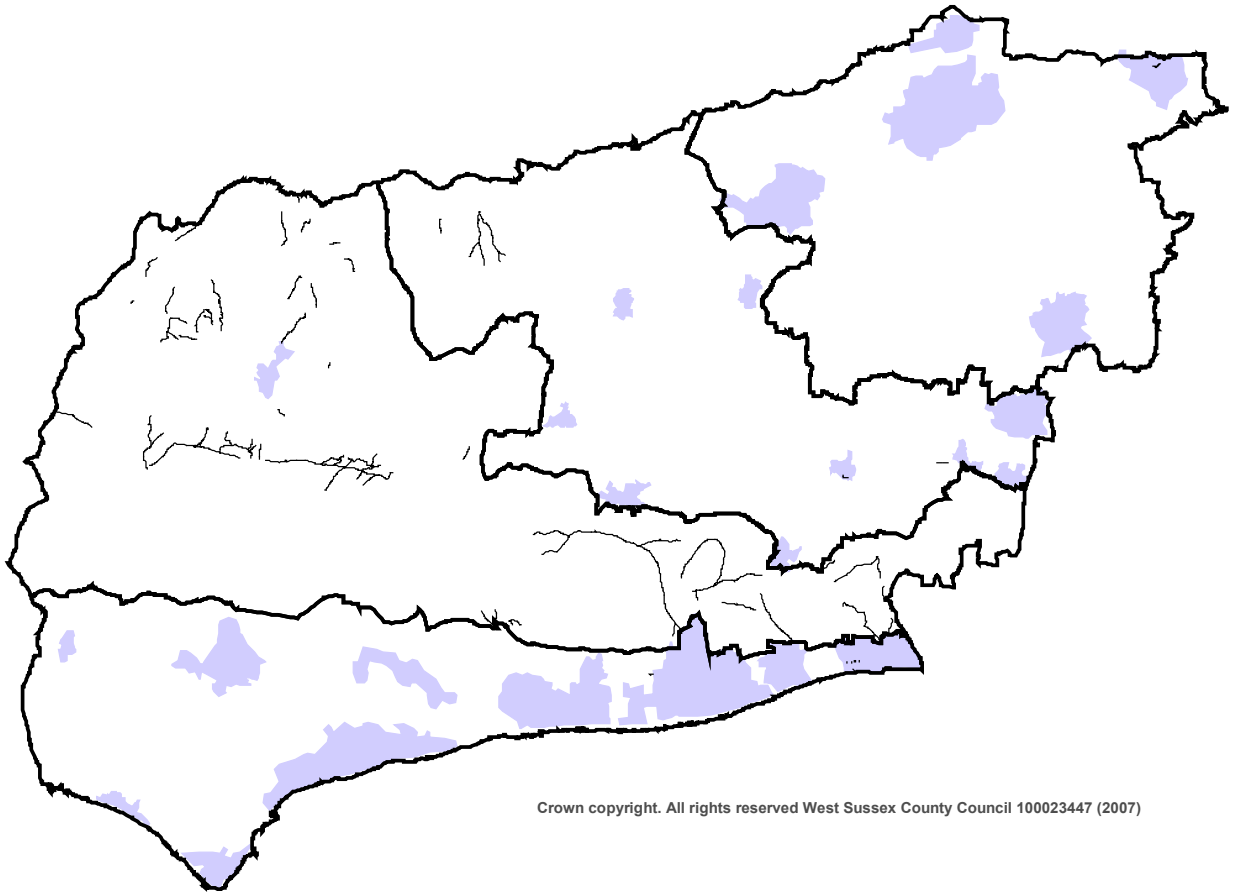


Figure 7. The restricted byway network

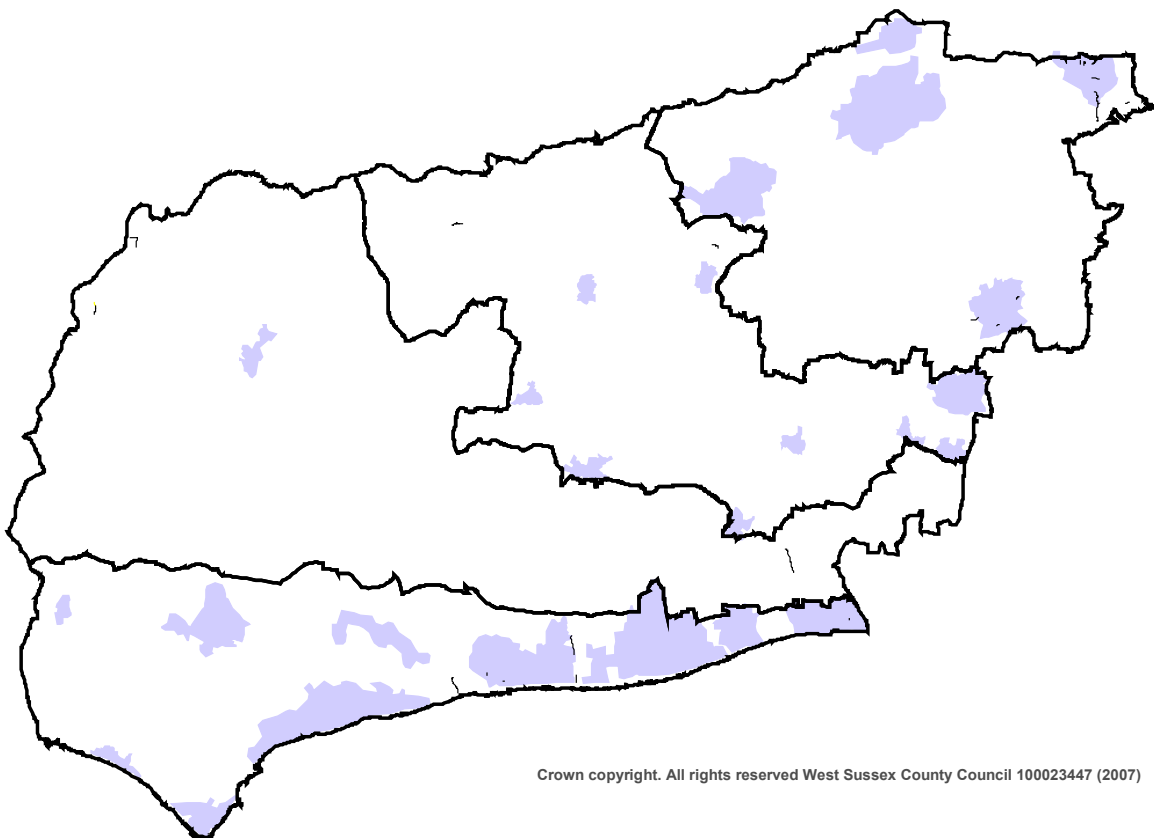


Figure 8. The byway open to all traffic (BOAT) network

4.1.7 It takes only cursory examination of the figures to identify that the distribution of rights of way, by type, is not uniform across the county. For example the Coastal Plain has very few bridleways, and those that do exist in the High Weald are very fragmented. The majority of restricted byways are in the South Downs.

4.2 Open access

4.2.1 Since September 2004, when the relevant sections of the CRoW Act 2000 commenced, the public has had a right of access, on foot, to mapped areas of heathland, downland and registered common land in West Sussex. The majority of this access land falls within the South Downs area. Figure 9 shows the distribution of CRoW open access land in the county.

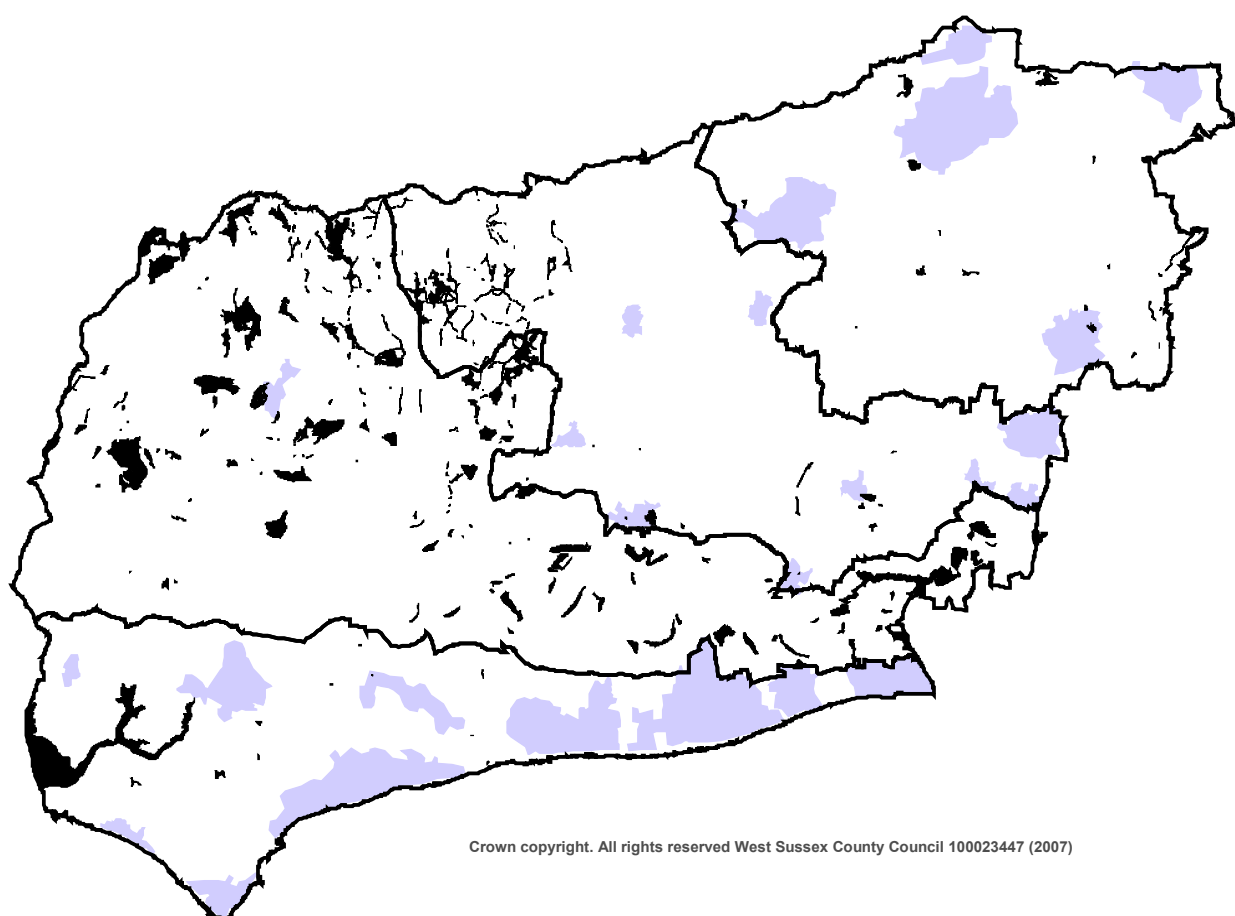


Figure 9. CRoW Open access land (heathland, downland and registered common land)

4.2.2 All CRoW open access land can be viewed at www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk, along with details of any restrictions or closures that may apply. Newer Ordnance Survey Explorer maps (1:25,000) also show CRoW open access land, which includes the freehold woodland areas that the Forestry Commission has dedicated as open access land under provisions in the CRoW Act 2000. These woods are in the north of the county and include St Leonard's and Tilgate Forests. The British Mountaineering Council has also dedicated a small parcel at Stone Hill Rocks (in the north east of the county)

allowing access for the general public as well as for climbers. Some other areas with permissive access (such as that provided by the National Trust and other organisations) are also shown on the OS maps.

- 4.2.3 Much of the land that was made available for access through the CRoW Act 2000 was already open and being used by the public on a permissive basis. This said, the CRoW Act 2000 introduced some new sites that are now available to the public for the first time. Much work has been carried out by WSCC and the South Downs joint Committee (SDJC) to make many sites more accessible and user-friendly, with the assistance of the relevant landowners. This has included the installation of kissing gates, stiles, information boards and signs, creating a new surfaced path through one area, making it accessible for use by those with mobility difficulties, and securing routes to link isolated 'island' sites to the wider access network. Almost every parcel of access land in the county now has at least one access point.

4.3 Access to the English coast

- 4.3.1 Most of the coast in West Sussex is already accessible to the public on foot, as it is serviced by a good network of footpaths, promenades and roads, as well as a good number of accessible beaches. However, there are a few notable gaps preventing continuous access along the West Sussex coast.
- 4.3.2 In the summer of 2007 the Government consulted on proposals to improve access to the English coast. In September 2007 it was announced that the Government intends to legislate so that the public will have the right to walk around the English coast for the first time. Detail of the legislation is currently being developed and expected to be included in the Marine Bill. The main areas of concern that came out of the consultation include issues of liability, costs, compensation, nature conservation, estuaries and higher rights. Such legislation should help plug the few gaps along the county's coast, allowing a continuous path to be created. Formalising the existing de facto access to beaches would give certainty to the public using these areas. Once the legislation is in place it is expected that it will take 10 years to provide a continuous path around the English coast.

4.4 Permissive access

- 4.4.1 There are many areas and routes to which the public has permissive access, including land owned or managed by a range of charitable and public organisations, such as the Forestry Commission, National Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and County, District and Parish Councils. There is also a variety of permissive access provided on private land. Some of this access has been made available through schemes such as Environmental Stewardship or English Woodland Grant Scheme, some through legal agreements with WSCC or the AONB Units, and some without any formal agreements being in place. Where agreements exist they are normally for a set period of time (often 5 or 10 years). However, where agreements do not exist permission may be withdrawn at any time. Most of this is for access on foot although some permissive routes and areas are provided for other users.

- 4.4.2 It can be difficult for the public to know where permissive access exists as it is not always well publicised and there is no single place where this information is available. Additionally, some landowners do not wish permissive access on their land to be widely promoted, providing it purely for local use. To begin to address this, areas with permissive access (not linear routes) within the Sussex Downs AONB have been mapped and currently the SDJC is working with Ordnance Survey to show these areas on their maps, with permission of the landowner. It would be desirable for this to be repeated for the whole of West Sussex, as well as for linear routes.

4.5 The highways network

- 4.5.1 Minor roads, including the unsealed and unclassified county roads (sometimes referred to as 'green lanes' or UCRs), play a significant part in connecting off-road routes in rural areas. However, major roads, including the A23, A24 and A27, and even some B and C roads that are becoming increasingly busy, have a negative effect, and sever the countryside access network in a number of places, resulting in a fragmented access network in many areas.

4.6 Long distance trails and promoted routes

- 4.6.1 There are many long distance trails in West Sussex. The most well known of these is the South Downs Way National Trail, which connects Winchester in Hampshire, to Eastbourne in East Sussex, traversing the full width of West Sussex. Other regionally important routes that are available to walkers, cyclists and horse riders include the Downs Link (which has incorporated the Coastal Link since 2007) and Worth Way, which in turn links with the Forest Way in East Sussex. These routes receive some additional maintenance due to their importance. Links to long distance promoted routes must be well maintained to enable people to access these flagship routes, or use sections to create circular routes.
- 4.6.2 Other linear, promoted or themed routes available to walkers include the Serpents Trail, the High Weald Landscape Trail, the Centurion Way (cyclists as well as walkers), the Literary Trail, the Sussex Border Path, the Monarch's Way, the Sussex Ouse Valley Way, the Sussex Diamond Way and the Wey-South Path. These promoted trails do not all necessarily receive higher maintenance than other rights of way due to resource limitations. Parts of some of these routes use paths that are not rights of way and this can lead to confusion over maintenance responsibilities. Most of these routes, as well as the regionally important routes above, are shown on Ordnance Survey Explorer (1:50,000 scale) and Landranger (1:25,000 scale) maps. Route guides exist for many of these trails produced by the County Council, AONB Units or by the voluntary and commercial sector.
- 4.6.3 Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, is working to achieve a continuous safe cycling route along the south coast (National Cycle Route 2). Sections between Worthing and Brighton in the east of the county, and between Hunston and Bosham in the west are now open.

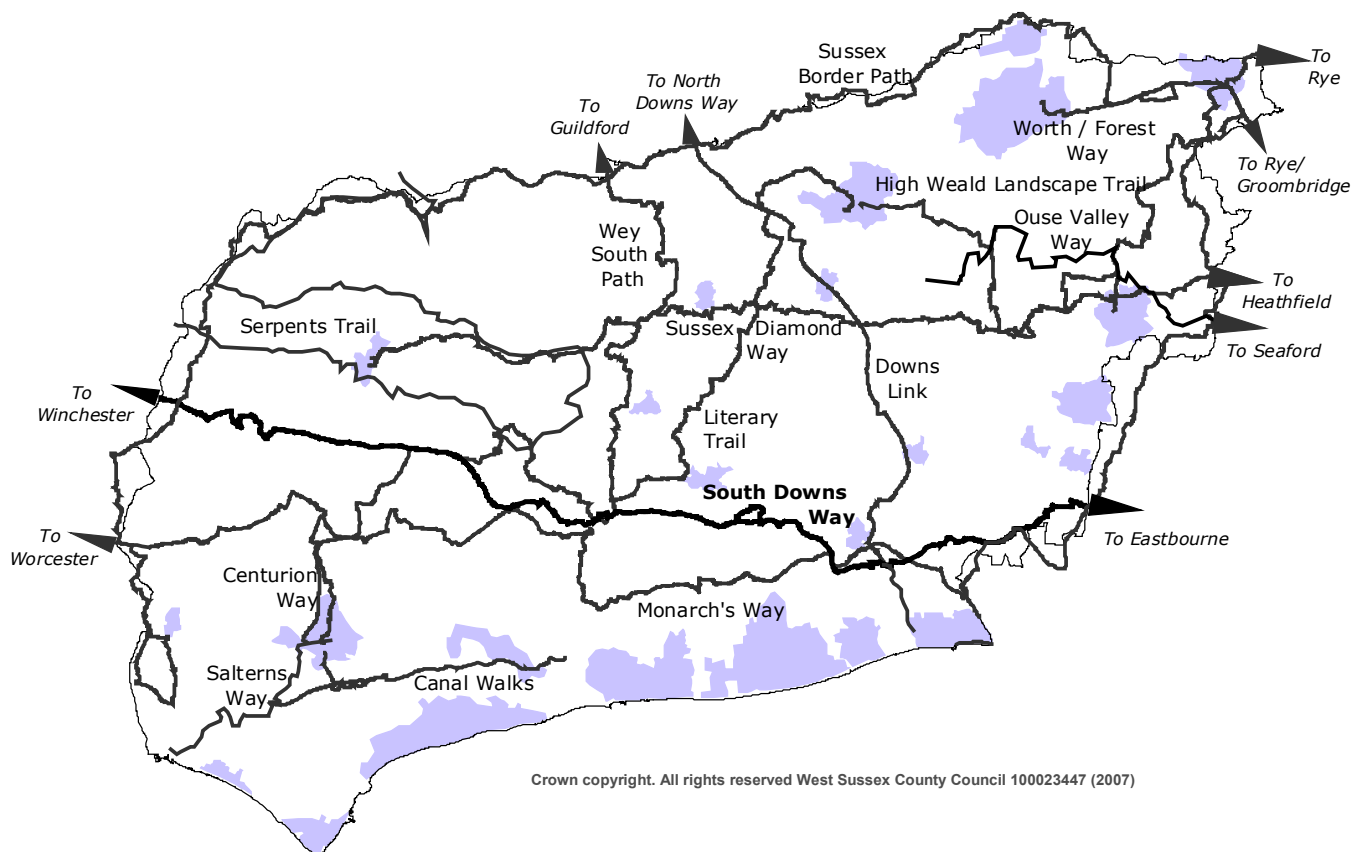


Figure 10. Long distance promoted routes

- 4.6.4 There is also a plethora of short circular promoted routes, mainly aimed at walkers, which are very popular. These are created and promoted by a range of organisations, including County, District/Borough and Parish Councils, AONB Units, charitable bodies such as National Trust and Wildlife Trust as well as by community groups and commercial enterprises.
- 4.6.5 The County Council will revise its very popular Wheelchair Walks booklet during 2008. This provides information on routes without barriers, which are suitable for all, including users of wheelchairs, pushchairs and those with mobility impairments. The AONB Units all promote easy access trails, including the recently opened Salterns Way (created and promoted by Chichester Harbour Conservancy (CHC)), which provides a flat, well surfaced route from Chichester to West Wittering. It is also available for cyclists.
- 4.6.6 Promotional literature often includes interesting facts about the area along with information on responsible access, aiming to encourage people who do not normally have the confidence to use the wider rights of way network to explore the countryside.

4.7 The complete access network

- 4.7.1 Although the rights of way network forms the foundation of access to the countryside, it does not stand alone and is not complete without the other forms of access. It is only when they are combined that they make up the full countryside access network, enabling people to fully enjoy the West Sussex countryside.