

OPENING STATEMENT: RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WESTERN WEALD

by Margaret Paren
on behalf of
SOUTH DOWNS CAMPAIGN

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I will add a few brief points on the role of national parks in the twenty first century.

First, and picking up on a point of discussion yesterday, the SDC believes that the NERC Act amendments clarify that the recreation criterion is related to the special qualities of the national park and that this may include not just its landscape, what you look at, but also the wildlife and cultural heritage that help form what it is.

We think this is of relevance to this re-opened inquiry and we have tried to demonstrate very simply in our proof the sorts of experiences that we believe meet the test for recreation in the revised legislation. They help meet the needs of a twenty first century national park and the diverse types of opportunities that people might want. All of our examples are directly related to the special qualities of the area, all do not provide just enjoyment, though they do that, but also educate people about those special qualities. So we do not think that recreation should be tested just by the amount of open access or the intensity of the rights of way network but by the diversity and quality of the experience. I just mention that all the examples chosen lie within what is described by the Landscape Assessor as the A3 corridor. All are exceptional experiences of their type, and I'm happy to explain what I mean by that if you want me to do so.

The second point I want to make refers to the points made by Mr Bodfish on Tuesday. This relates to what he described as 'pinch points'. I think these were described in the Landscape Assessor's report as honey pots. But whatever they are called, they are the areas where people congregate. Some, like the Seven

Sisters Country Park and the Queen Elizabeth Country Park are designed to fulfil that role, honey pots for urban bees was a term devised by the first Director of the Countryside Commission, or so his son tells me. Others, like Selborne, are honey pots for a particular reason, in Selborne's case the reason is cultural. It is these places that need relief from the concentration of visitors.

There will be 3 sub regions abutting the national park, whether chalk only or with the Weald and another within a few miles of its most northerly point if the Weald is included. The visitor pressure will cause major problems to a chalk only national park since bare chalk hills cannot absorb visitors to anything like the same extent as the Wealden landscapes. It is the Wealden landscapes that have the additional carrying capacity and I can say as a member of the SDJC that I have very real concerns about the fate of a chalk only national park in coping with visitor pressure. Again, I'm happy to talk further about this if you wish, it is also very relevant to Professor Tregay's evidence next week.