

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

		Paper Number
1.	3.00 <b>Welcome, apologies and housekeeping</b>	
2.	<b>Minutes of previous meeting</b>	LAF13/15
3.	<b>Declaration of interest</b>	
4.	3.10 <b>Plan of Engagement between NE, Defra and LAFs</b>	LAF13/16 – AW
5.	3.25 <b>National LAF Annual Report – 2011-2012</b>	LAF13/17 – AW
6.	3.40 <b>SLAF Annual Report 2011-2012</b> <b>SLAF Annual Report 2012-2013 – draft</b>	LAF13/18 – DF LAF13/19 – DF
7.	4.00 <b>SLAF Recruitment</b>	Verbal – DF
8.	4.10 <b>A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk</b>	LAF13/20 – DF
9.	4.20 <b>Triennial Review of EA and NE</b>	LAF13/21 – DF
10.	4.30 <b>Breaking New Ground</b>	LAF13/22 – DF
11.	4.40 <b>Rights of Way and Rail Crossings Update</b>	LAF13/23 – AW
12.	4.50 <b>Any Other Business</b>	
13.	4.55 <b>Public question time</b>	
14.	5.00 <b>Dates &amp; Venues of Future Meetings</b>	

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Minutes of meeting held at Gt Blakenham Village Hall on 18 April 2013</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Jill Christley</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

## 1. Welcome, apologies and housekeeping

Present: Bryan Collen (Chair) (BC), David Barker (Vice-Chair) (DB), Ann Langley (AL), Alan Moore (AM), Monica Pipe (MP), Norman Southgate (NS), Mike Taylor (MT), John Wayman (JW),

SCC Officers Present: Jill Christley (minutes), David Falk (DF), Alan Thorndyke (AT), Andrew Woodin (AW).

Apologies: Melinda Appleby (MA), Barry Hall (BH), Margaret Hancock (MH), Cllr Sandy Martin, Gordon Merfield (GM), Cllr Jane Storey (JS), Anthony Wright (AWR)..

BC welcomed guest speakers, Neil Winship and Nick Collinson to the meeting.

## 2. Minutes of previous meeting (LAF 13/09)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed to be an accurate record.

Matters arising:

Natural England Nature Reserves SLAF had fed back their views to Natural England (NE). NE are proposing to create a permissive circular route going round the Westleton Heath site. DF has requested clarification of the details of the route.

Countryside Access and Health The action point had been held over, awaiting publication of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

**ACTION** When more information on which to base a letter is available SLAF to write to Clinical Commissioning Group and Department of Public Health to lobby to encourage healthy access to the countryside and consider resource implications.

Triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England SLAF response had been submitted. Copy of response was circulated.

A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement Scheme Work on the A11 underpass had started. AW reported that Rights of Way staff are working on diversions to link routes to the underpass.

Wild Anglia A representative of Wild Anglia had not been available to give a presentation to SLAF. This was covered in Nick Collinson's presentation.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

### 4. Quiet Lanes

Neil Winship (NW), Parish Councillor Waldringfield and SALC representative on SC&H AONB Partnership Committee spoke to the Forum about Quiet Lanes.

The Department for Transport has authorised highway authorities to designate and sign networks of minor rural roads appropriate for shared use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other vehicles.

The aim is to 'maintain the character of minor rural roads by seeking to contain rising traffic growth that is widespread in rural areas. Improving and maintaining the quality of life for local residents should take precedence over general objectives to ease traffic movements.'

CPRE's guide to quiet lanes state they are 'a positive way of providing a chance for people to walk, cycle and horse-ride in a safer environment, widening transport choice and protecting the character and tranquillity of country lanes.'

NW noted they are not anti-motorist; as about introducing speed limits or erecting barriers.

Having studied the CPRE guide, NW started a survey of Waldringfield parish and read reports from other counties that had tried them. Most of those counties found Quiet Lanes not to be cost-effective: Costs were high due to council officers' time and travel. The cost of posts and signs at £100 each was minimal. Quiet Lanes were deemed ineffective due to monitoring vehicle speeds and numbers, and often it seems there was a failure to campaign.

Quiet Lanes Suffolk plan to campaign under the slogan '**Expect and Respect**' – **Expect** vulnerable road users just round the bend and **Respect** their right to a fair share of road space.

Of Suffolk's roads, 90% are minor rural with 90% of those being C and unclassified. To justify any expenditure SCC will need a pilot scheme demonstrating cost-effectiveness.

The pilot scheme will focus on a specific area in order to ensure locals and visitors will encounter a Quiet Lane reasonably often.

The clerks of the 63 AONB parishes were invited to express interest and nominate a champion. 16 responded and five of them have proposed 13 potential lanes. Besides those parishes, firm messages of support had been received from Suffolk Ramblers, the Stour and Orwell Society, the Suffolk Preservation Society, the Stour Valley Beagles and a handful of cycling projects, plus the Environment Editor of the EADT.

The launch of phase 1 of the pilot is planned for the weekend of 13/14 July 2013. It is hoped that base-line data can be collected before the launch, and about 3 months of post-launch data over the rest of summer 2013. Since walking etc. is seasonal and weather dependent, and the **Expect and Respect** campaign will take months to have effect, that pilot may well need to continue through 2014 to gather enough evidence to convince SCC Highways to proceed to phase 2.

Phase 2 will probably comprise similar networks of Quiet Lanes in both the Shotley Peninsula and in Waveney AONB parishes.

Subsequent phases could see coverage of the whole of the SC&H AONB, a similar network in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley AONB and progressive extension throughout Suffolk.

NW asked whether SLAF could offer support and advice on campaigning, and suggestions on how to finance electronic counters (costing £4000 each) which are needed to convince the Highways authority that Quiet Lanes are cost effective.

The long term vision is for Quiet Lanes to become the rural equivalent of the Times newspapers 'cities fit for cycling' campaign, and for many of the other AONBs in England and Wales to collaborate with similar schemes so the campaign can gain national traction. They will meet the public health goals set out in the NICE consultation.

The Forum discussed NW's presentation, and considered the effect of Quiet Lanes on Rights of Way, and the problem of funding.

Various members felt that there had been an increase in traffic levels on rural roads, particularly from delivery vans. BC considered that Quiet Lanes would be supported by the public, particularly where they linked in with Public Rights of Way.

On the subject of funding DB asked whether there was a cheaper option to the £4000 counting monitors. MP suggested that local villagers may be willing to contribute, particularly if they felt they would benefit.

AW asked why Quiet Lanes were considered not to be cost-effective. NW believed that the success of previous schemes had not been properly measured, having focussed on traffic levels, rather than the levels of other users.

## 5. Natural Environment.

Nick Collinson, Natural Environment Manager spoke to the Forum about the natural environment in Suffolk.

20% of Suffolk is covered by statutory designations ie. AONB, SSSI, etc. In addition to this 36% of the county is designated for wildlife or landscape.

### The vision:

- Suffolk's natural environment is recognised as having an important social and economic function, as well as being important in its own right.

- Communities, businesses and visitors work together in partnership to conserve and enhance Suffolk's natural environment.
- Information on Suffolk's natural environment is readily available to all, and data updated regularly.
- The role of Suffolk's natural environment in supporting green economic growth is seen as one of Suffolk's key strengths.
- Decision makers, developers & planners in Suffolk have access to high quality information & advice on the natural environment and how statutory requirements can be met appropriately.
- Suffolk County Council is seen as the strategic lead for cross-county natural environment issues.

#### **Mission statement**

- We will make a positive difference for Suffolk's natural environment.
- We are committed to working together, and with our external partners, striving to improve and securing the best possible services and environment for the people of Suffolk.
- We are committed to working together, and with our external partners, to inspire and support the people of Suffolk to engage with their local natural environment.
- We will be a leader in the natural environment sector in Suffolk

#### **Priority actions this year**

- Sizewell (leading the environment work package)
- East Anglia One, Bramford-Twinstead cross-county power cabling etc
- Support to Districts & Borough LPAs
- Hosting and supporting Partnerships through periods of change (maintain current levels of funding)
- Develop better understanding of economic value of ecosystem services in Suffolk
- Supporting the development of Wild Anglia
- Supporting the development of the Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership
- Development of NSWVG and bid for funding for a Norfolk-Suffolk CWS woodland project
- Natural environment profile with decision makers
- Supporting Partnership HLF projects (AONBs, Brecks)

People enjoy the natural environment in Suffolk. It is hugely important to Suffolk in a wide range of ways, particularly quality of life, tourism economy etc. Open Access, PRow etc are key mechanisms by which people enjoy the natural environment.

#### **Sizewell**

The Sizewell site falls within the SC&H AONB. Its design will consider the natural environment, for example, a bridge will be built to link two important areas: the Minsmere levels and the Sizewell Belts. Looking ahead, the operational area will be much larger, the Natural Environment Team will discuss with EDF how to return the area to heathland.

The Forum discussed the extent of Rights of Way within Suffolk, particularly to wildlife areas. The newsletter produced by the Natural Environment Team was

well received; members expressed an interest in receiving it regularly, NC agreed to include SLAF in its circulation.

**ACTION** JC get SLAF onto circulation list, and distribute newsletters to members.

The effect of Ash die-back disease (*Chalara fraxinea*) was also discussed. It is hoped that the area of woodland at the new Bramford substation will mitigate the visual impact of the site. However, this may not be effective if Ash in the wood is severely affected by the disease.

BC thanked NC for his presentation.

## 6. LAF National Conference.

BH had attended the national conference, as reported in document LAF 13/10. BC expressed his thanks to BH for attending.

## 7. Updates

Government Forestry Policy Statement. LAF13/11. JW expressed concern about the effect of large numbers of people visiting woodland. AW stated that access must be managed. MT explained that the woodland environment is a robust one, and can cope with visitors.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans of the future. LAF13/12. BC hoped that DEFRA would not be too prescriptive in their requirements, as different areas have different needs.

Review of Maps of Open Country and Registered Common Land. LAF 13/13 was discussed.

**ACTION** AW to update SLAF on changes to register of common land.

## 8. SLAF Recruitment

With seven memberships ending in 2013 SCC will undertake another round of recruitment in the autumn. Regardless of membership periods, members were asked to advise DF if they wanted to step down.

**ACTION** ALL notify DF if stepping down from SLAF this year.

## 9. Any Other Business

Stewardship Schemes. The manual for permissive schemes has now been re-written. Access alongside environmental stewardship strips at the side of fields has been added, and is a change to the originally published manual.

**ACTION** DB let AW know where the manual can be found.

Department of Transport – Safer Roads for Cyclists. The Safer Roads for Cyclists project has a £40m budget to fund safer cycling across the country. SCC made a successful bid, and have received £2m for a cycle bridge over the A14 at Bury St Edmunds, and £200k to improve the bridleway between West Row and Mildenhall.

AT noted Government funding is available at various times, but they are generally looking for 'shovel ready' projects. It is important to think about improvements, and have figures available, ready for SCC to bid.

**10. Public Question Time**

No members of the public attended the meeting.

**11. Dates and Venues of Future Meetings.**

11 July 2013 15.00 Assington Village Hall.

17 October 2013 Elveden Village Hall.

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Plan of Engagement between Natural England, Defra and Local Access Forums</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

Natural England have produced an Engagement Plan which restates the roles and relationships of Defra, NE, the Appointing Authority and LAFs.

Through Natural England, Defra is placing increasing emphasis on local access forums and developing a more focused and strategic relationship with LAFs. They express a keenness to continue to facilitate and enable a sharing within the LAF family of ideas, suggestions and current best practice (see agenda item on the annual national LAF report).

A new Natural England LAF local contact has been appointed, this is Fiona Taylor and she is well known to officers and has a very good knowledge of rights of way issues. She will be discussing how Natural England will be able to support SLAF for the rest of this year. This will most likely involve a more targeted approach and there will be opportunities for members to discuss how Natural England can work with them and help achieve your priorities this year, resource permitting.

Natural England has also appointed Regional Coordinators to support LAFs (the coordinator for Suffolk is Michelle Gardiner, who hopes to be at this meeting), and produced the first edition of a quarterly newsletter which will provide opportunities to share good practice between LAFs, information from Natural England and Defra. This is attached as an appendix.

In the light of the increased emphasis on local access forums, SLAF is invited to consider what priorities it wishes to concentrate on in the coming year.

The Engagement Plan:

#### Purpose of Plan

1.1 This plan summarises the role of Local Access Forums (LAFs) and clarifies the relationship between the LAFs, Natural England and Defra. It is designed to be a dynamic document that informs and guides all three parties to direct and focus effort, and has been produced in part, as a result of feedback received from the LAFs at the 2013 conference and in general discussions. It will be kept under regular review and revised as necessary.

1.2 In parallel Natural England will produce a LAF Annual Report to Defra which will highlight achievements and current issues.

#### Introduction



2.1 Local Access Forums (LAFs) are advisory bodies established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. LAFs are established by local highway authorities and National Park Authorities (termed the Appointing Authorities in the legislation) and their main function is to provide independent advice to the Government and to section 94 bodies<sup>1</sup> on the improvement of public access to land in that area for the purposes of open air recreation and the enjoyment of the area, and on other matters prescribed.

2.2 'Guidance on Local Access Forums in England' was issued by the Secretary of State in 2007. It remains an essential reference guide which details respective roles and responsibilities and can be found on the LAF section of the Natural England Website and on Huddle.

2.3 Whilst LAFs have clear statutory duties, they can add value to their local access agenda by going beyond their statutory brief and embracing a wider role.

2.4 There are currently 83 active LAFs in England and they are made up of voluntary members appointed by the Appointing Authority. The Appointing Authority provides secretariat support for the meetings as well as expenses for the LAF members.

2.5 The importance of LAFs was recognised in the Natural Environment White Paper, June 2011, particularly in para 4.33 which recognised that 'Clear, well maintained paths and bridleways are important to give people access to the natural environment and can be enjoyed by cyclists, walkers and horse riders. There is considerable scope to improve and extend this network for example through LAFs and Rights of Way Improvement Plans.'

### The LAF role

3.1 The primary purpose of LAFs is to provide advice to a range of organisations specified in the CROW Act, 2000 and in supplementary regulations and guidance. Specifically to:

'advise as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area, and as to such other matters as may be prescribed (Secretary of State, Guidance on LAFs, 2007, para 3.1.1).'

The LAFs set their own priorities depending on local issues and what is of interest to the group members, as well as providing a local input to consultations and draft policy documents.

Matters of interest are likely to include:

- the management of access land;
- the condition of PROW and work to record PROW;
- improvements to the network of routes and open spaces in an area including PROW and access land;
- provision of greenspace (including woodland and coast);
- relationship with other sectors with an interest in providing opportunities to enjoy open air recreation including health, sport tourism, land management and biodiversity;
- how local authorities prioritise their spend on access and recreation;

3.2 Each forum meets at least twice per year, but generally more often. Members of the public are entitled to attend meetings and may be permitted to contribute to discussion.

3.3 Members serve in a personal capacity to represent interests rather than particular organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> The Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000, Section 94(4) specifies that it is the function of a local access forum, as respects to the area for which it is established, to advise the appointing authority; the local highway authority; other bodies exercising functions under CROW Act Part 1 (Natural England, Forestry Commission and English Heritage) and such other bodies as may be prescribed. These other bodies are set out in the LAF Regulations 2007, paragraph 21, and include: any conservation board established by the Secretary of State, any parish or town council in the area covered by the LAF, and Sport England.

## Role of the Appointing Authority

4.1 Appointing authorities have a duty to support their forum and contribute to its effectiveness, by:

- setting the Terms of Appointment for forum members;
- appointing suitable forum members and notifying them of their Terms of Appointment;
- providing a secretary to administer the forum;
- publicising the forum agenda, minutes and papers for public inspection;
- publishing the forum's annual report (and if necessary assisting with writing), and sending a copy to Natural England;
- assisting LAFs with producing their Annual Report Proforma (see below), and adding comments where required;
- meeting the forum's reasonable running costs and reasonable training needs;
- providing suitable venues and refreshments for forum meetings;
- maintaining a good working relationship with the forum, and assisting the forum in developing its forward work programme, promotional material and events, etc;
- helping the forum to develop criteria for measuring effectiveness; and
- reimbursing members' expenses in respect of travel and subsistence costs, and any expenses for the care of children or dependants (and notifying the forum members of the rules for claiming expenses).

4.2 As a section 94(4) body, an appointing authority should also:

- have regard to relevant advice from the LAF;
- consult the LAF at an early stage on relevant (not just statutory) matters;
- provide information, reports, background papers, speakers etc;
- give timely feedback on advice received from the LAF;
- raise awareness of the LAF amongst officers and members throughout the authority.

4.3 The appointing authority must ensure the LAF is made up from a range of different people from the local community representing landowners / managers, access users (such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders) and other interests (such as health and conservation). Members are appointed to provide independent, constructive, relevant, inclusive, incisive and informed advice which takes account of a broad range and balance of local interests about access issues and priorities affecting the local area or which influence national policy.

## Defra role

5.1 Defra is the Government department with responsibility for policy on access and recreation in England, including access to open country under the CROW Act and management of public rights of way. Defra is also responsible for policy on local access forums.

5.2 Defra's core purpose is to improve the current and future quality of life. It brings together the interests of farmers and the countryside; the environment and the rural economy; the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink. This is achieved by integrating environmental, social and economic objectives - putting sustainable development into practice every day, and by championing sustainable development as the way forward for Government.

5.3 Defra will work with ministers and departments to promote LAFs and their work. It will work with Natural England to report annually to ministers, based on the information gathered from the LAF annual reports. It will also provide Natural England with the direction for LAFs from Ministerial interests.

5.4 Defra is responsible for the creation of regulations and guidance to support the CROW Act. It keeps this under review and updates it as necessary.

5.5 Defra is keen to support the success of LAFs and will assist with the development and delivery of training when possible.

## Natural England role

6.1 Natural England is the Government's advisor for the natural environment in England. Its job is to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations. Its work is a significant component in the delivery of the Government's aspirations for improving the natural environment in England as described in the Natural Environment White Paper of 2011, and is the lead body for the Government's Biodiversity 2020 programme.

Natural England is charged with conserving the natural environment as a resource for people to enjoy, understand and study. We are also responsible for promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open air recreation.

Natural England's access and engagement work includes supporting the maintenance and promotion of 13 National Trails and managing 143 National Nature Reserves (NNRs), delivering coastal access, regulating open access and working in partnership with others to deliver and promote responsible public access and engagement.

6.2 Natural England's statutory role in respect to LAFs is limited and covers:

- receiving copies of all local access forum annual reports; and
- being notified of changes made to forum arrangements and changes in the Secretary.

6.3 In addition, as a section 94 body (see paragraph 2.1) Natural England welcomes advice from the LAFs on:

- the operation of open access restrictions, management and mapping;
- the condition of National Trails;
- access to the coast;
- the implementation of HLS/conservation management on access land;
- the effects of HLS/conservation management on rights of way;
- facilities and services for visitors at National Nature Reserves;
- opportunities afforded to LAFs through engagement with Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); and
- other matters relating to the provision of access and opportunities for the enjoyment of the natural environment.

6.4 In addition to its statutory function, Natural England provides support to LAFs by championing their role at national and local levels and by facilitating the exchange of good practice. To do this, where resources allow, Natural England will:

- maintain an online LAF workspace (e.g. Huddle) which enables LAF members, NE and Defra to communicate and work together nationally;
- produce an annual national LAF report for Defra;
- facilitate the sharing of knowledge and good practice gathered from meetings, annual reporting, meetings and events. To support this, in 2013/14 Natural England will issue a quarterly newsletter and will create a themed good practice section on Huddle;
- facilitate the provision of external Regional Coordinators who support LAFs by providing advice, training and facilitation as well as encouraging the production of annual reports and organising regional LAF meetings and conferences;
- hold a regular LAF Chairs conference;
- provide focussed input to LAF meetings (through an agreed targeted plan of engagement), particularly regional groupings, seeking to attend where it can make a difference;
- maintain a LAF section on its website which includes information and up to date contact links to all LAFs;
- manage communication between LAFs, Defra and Natural England (and other national bodies) via meetings, email, Huddle (in effect providing a conduit between local LAF interests and Defra / Ministerial interests).

Martin Shaw, Natural England, May 2013

# LAF NEWS

delete the 'subject' line and put UNSUBSCRIBE instead before you send.

- **Discussions** – when posting please be succinct, stay 'on subject' and try to keep posts short and easy to follow.
- **Links** – when posting information to Huddle you can include hyperlinks to other relevant areas of the workspace (discussions, documents, whiteboards). Right-click on the file/whiteboard/discussion you would like to link to and select 'copy shortcut' or 'copy link location'. Then right-click paste this into your text.
- **Easy Access** – you can access the Huddle from any internet enabled computer – just type *defra.huddle.net* in the web browser's address field and hit 'return'. There's also free, easy to use Huddle apps available for many smartphones and also the iPad.
- **Search** – the search facility in Huddle (click 'Search' at the top of the screen) is quick and easy to use and searches all the content in all areas of the workspace apart from the 'People' section.
- **Guidance** – in the 'Guidance/FAQs' folder in the 'Files' section there are numerous guides to help with using Huddle including 2 (soon to be updated) introductory videos. Huddle's own 'Help' section (available by clicking 'Help' at the top of the screen) is also very comprehensive.
- **Join in** - if any LAF member would like to join Huddle, please contact Regional Coordinator or [Rob Leek](#), who will arrange access.

Contact [Rob Leek](#) with suggestions ideas or feedback.



Local Access Forum Newsletter – Issue 1



# LAF NEWS

Issue 1: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

## Welcome

(by Wendy Thompson, Natural England Principal Adviser for Access and Engagement)

Welcome to the first issue of this newsletter dedicated to keeping LAF members across England up to date about national issues and local good practice. The team at Natural England want this newsletter to be full of information that will help you to advise on public access wherever you are and whatever your views. Your stories are essential to making this happen and I look forward to hearing more from you to add to future editions.

Meanwhile in this edition we report back from the LAF national conference which was on the theme of sharing good practice and update you on how you can continue to share information on Huddle about what works well - and what doesn't. We also bring news of a new tool to help you to bring together facts and figures about the people who visit the natural environment in your area. Stories in this edition from LAFs include Durham's success in the dedication of access and Shropshire's approach to working with communities to create applications to the Paths for Communities grant scheme. We also feature some of the hot debates on Huddle as well as some tips on using Huddle. Remember anyone who has a computer can join Huddle and can contribute to the discussion forums and share information with other LAF members.

Natural England is keen to continue to support LAFs and we remain focused on helping to share ideas, suggestions and good practice along with attendance at meetings where we can add value. To provide clarity about our role we have produced the attached Engagement Plan which restates the roles and relationships of Defra, Natural England, the LAFs and their appointing authorities. We hope you find this useful.

We have limited statutory roles in relation to LAFs but one of these is to collate your annual reports. This year, for the first time, and in response to your feedback, we have created a national annual report with highlights from the 80 annual reports received. This has been presented to Defra is available for all LAFs on Huddle and via the LAF Chairs. This, along with the newsletter, will help to raise the profile of LAFs and the good work that you are achieving.

Please do respond to this newsletter with stories to share and with suggestions for how we can make this an effective way to keep you informed.

In this issue:

- [LAF Conference](#)
- [MENE](#)
- [Durham dedication](#)
- [Working with Paths for Communities](#)
- [South East Conference](#)
- [LAF survey](#)
- [Huddle Highlights](#)
- [Huddle Tips](#)



# LAF NEWS



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## National Conference Report 2013

The theme of the conference was 'Sharing good practice and Sharing solutions'. The event took place in Sheffield at the end of February and was well attended by 99 members from 72 LAFs, which represented 88% of LAFs from across the country. The event was funded by Natural England but very much led by the LAFs and chaired independently by Steve Scoffin, who had recently stood down as Vice Chair of County Durham LAF. The majority of workshops and talks were led by LAF members and supported by Regional Coordinators and Natural England staff. Many thanks to the LAF members who ran the workshops, to the Regional Coordinators for helping to put the event together, to the speakers from Natural England and Defra, and to Steve for keeping everyone in order and on time.

### Follow up from the Event:

The wealth of information generated from the conference - including a record of the workshops - can be found on the Huddle workspace and the [Natural England website](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/7685821) and should help to feed continuing discussions. The workshop themes included: benefits to health; working with the planning system; dealing with funding cuts; green infrastructure and open access. We are trialling the use of Huddle Whiteboards to encourage the sharing of good practice in these and other specific themes. Feedback from delegates was largely positive and all of the following points have been noted for future events.

- Strong LAF involvement in designing the event was highly valued. The networking opportunities were particularly welcomed by delegates; although, as several said, there is never enough time!
- It was felt that some of the logistics, such as catering, could have been more streamlined, more space was needed for the workshops, and bigger name badges would have been helpful.

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/7685821>

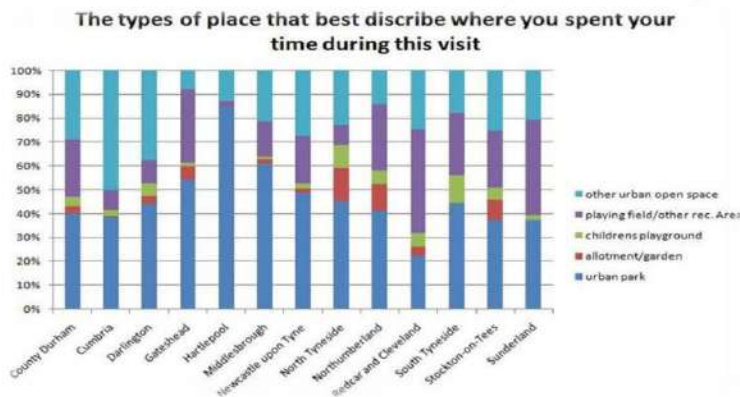
Contact [Rob Leek](#) with

# LAF NEWS

## Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)

Those who attended the LAF conference were given a fascinating insight into MENE and for those who missed it, Stephen Herbert's presentation can be found on Huddle under conference feedback. Lots of LAFs have expressed an interest in making more use of MENE data in their work, and the good news is: plans are well in hand to make this easier.

An example of the data MENE can produce



Natural England is developing an online tool which will allow LAFs to produce a list of results from MENE, along with maps of where visits are against demographic variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status etc. In addition it may be possible to provide a brief overview of the headline findings on environmental engagement within a LAF, complete with tables, charts, maps and text. The tool will be free to use and will be updated annually. When launched later this year it will include the four year's data collected to date. Watch this space for further update

## Durham Dedication

(by Jim Milner, Lead Advisor, Natural England, Access Local Delivery Team)

Following a request from the County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF), Durham County Council agreed to dedicate two pieces of land as open access.

Cllr Neil Foster, said: "We're delighted to dedicate this land as open access so that residents have the freedom to enjoy more of the beautiful scenery that County Durham provides. I look forward to the council and the Local Access Forum continuing to work together for the benefit of the people of County Durham."

Geoff Hughes, Chair of the County Durham Local Access Forum, said: "The County Durham Local Access Forum welcomes the decision of the county council to dedicate two areas of land, one here at Waldrige Fell and the other at South Moor, for open access. Both areas adjoin land that already has open access and this decision will ensure that residents and visitors to County Durham alike will be able to enjoy both these areas for the foreseeable future.

"The LAF has been asking the council to take this action and we are pleased that

Contact [Rob Leek](#) with suggestions ideas or feedback.



## LAF NEWS

they have now seen the benefits that will accrue. We hope that other landowners will now follow the lead of the council and dedicate suitable land for open access, and that the council themselves will regard this as only a start. Already Natural England have a programme of dedicating their nature reserves. We would be pleased to discuss the benefits of dedication with other landowners."



### Working with Paths for Communities

(By Jim Stabler, Access Development Officer for Shropshire County Council)

Shropshire has found that LAF involvement in Paths for Communities (P4C) schemes has been essential from the outset. Potential projects were put forward at LAF meetings and one of the members of the LAF was nominated as a champion for the scheme. The person nominated was one with a particular interest in the project or detailed experience in the area of access concerned. The nominated champion explored the potential project in more detail and gave a presentation at the next LAF meeting. If the LAF liked the project and considered it feasible then it was endorsed for development.

The champion then became involved in the writing of the bid application and provided regular updates on progress at subsequent LAF meetings. This procedure ensured every project was given the full support of the LAF from inception to completion.

### South East Conference

(by Jonathan Clark, Strategic Access Advisor, Buckinghamshire County Council)

Seven speakers and fifty delegates attended the South East Regional LAF conference on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013 in London. Sarah Slade, from the CLA, outlined from their paper: *'The Right Way Forward: The CLA's common Sense approach to accessing the countryside 2012'*. An excellent keynote speaker, Sarah was invited to try and redress the balance towards more speakers representing the farming and landowning community and reflected a concern that local access issues were being discussed without their input.

Richard Brooks from the MOD, outlined the varied and often unique access issues encountered on some of the vast expanses of MOD land - including visitors that carry away rather dangerous souvenirs from their visits! Andrew Kerry-Bedell, from 'Mobi-Scan', then described a range of technologies available, using on-site QR codes,

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# LAF NEWS

that can help to improve access information.

The afternoon was taken up with two advocates of cycling access. Bob Dampier, a LAF member from the South Downs National Park, outlined the stark difference between the level of cycling access enjoyed in the South Downs National Park and opposition, by some groups, to the development of cycling access in the New Forest. Sara Randle of the CTC, spoke about plans to encourage greater access to market towns and stations in the Chilterns. This included Berkhamstead, hence attendance from Herts LAF, Eastern Region. Sara's enthusiasm was infectious; although, horse riders reminded delegates of the need for cyclists to be aware of the sensitivity and skittishness of horses. A plea was made for a speaker from the horse riding community at next years conference.

Kevin Haugh, Natural England, emphasised Natural England's remit to protect the natural environment. He went on to speak about changes to delivery within access and engagement and how Natural England, Defra, Local Authorities and LAFs need to understand each other's roles. Finally, Adam Wallace – also from Natural England - outlined progress on the formation of Local Nature Partnerships and spoke of the importance of LAF involvement.

It is hoped LAF members and Officers had an enjoyable day.

## LAF Survey

In March 2013 Natural England surveyed LAF Chairs and Secretaries to obtain an insight into how effective we have been in supporting LAFs work. We received a fantastic response with seventy eight questionnaires completed. The results are summarised in the attached report, which can also be found on Huddle. The information it contains will help us to prioritise our support for LAFs in 2013.

## Huddle Highlights

Of the wide ranging discussions on Huddle the one that has caught our eye this month is the slide show from Dave Allen of Worcester LAF. The presentation strongly backs the principle of least restrictive option and has some very good and practical examples of access infrastructure. Natural England would not support everything in the presentation and in particular the recommendation that some bridleways are closed for part of the year in poor weather - a suggestion that respondents to the discussion on Huddle have also challenged very robustly.

The presentation demonstrates the value of LAFs gathering and sharing good practice and we are using some of the slides to brief staff in Natural England that work on land management schemes (Higher Level Stewardship etc) about what to look out for in good access infrastructure. If you are a member you can find the discussion thread on Huddle [here](#) and join the debate.

## Huddle Tips

**(by Rob Leek, Lead Advisor, Natural England, Access and Rights of Way Delivery)**

For those not familiar with it, the LAF Huddle Workspace is an online internet resource for LAF members which includes a discussion forum, bulletin boards (whiteboards), calendar and document library. Here are some tips to try and help you get more out of it:

- **Email notifications** – when alerting other Huddle members to new content, try to only notify those relevant (e.g. members from a particular region). To unsubscribe from an email alert, reply to one of the Huddle notification emails,

Contact [Rob Leek](#) with suggestions ideas or feedback.

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>National LAF Annual Report – 2011-2012</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

Natural England has compiled a report of the activity of LAFs during the period April 2011-March 2012 highlighting achievements and issues compiled from LAF annual reports.

These include:

- Cumbria LAF's involvement in Coastal Access,
- Cambridgeshire LAF working with the Wildlife Trust to assess disabled access to the Greater Fen Project,
- Buckinghamshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire LAFs being significant consultees for the HS2 railway.

The report also refers to the use of Huddle (76% LAFs represented), the LAF National Conference (89% LAFs attended) and annual work programmes. Work programmes are used by some LAFs to set annual objectives. Areas of work typically include responding to national and local consultations, and to open access restrictions from Natural England.

Key issues include pressure on budgets for improving and maintaining access, awareness of LAFs locally and nationally, and communication from Natural England.

The full report is below:

## Foreword by Natural England

This is Natural England's annual report to Defra on the work that Local Access Forums achieved during the year ending 31 March 2012. We have collated together a selection of notable achievements from the individual annual reports, as well as some of the issues raised. Together they provide an interesting overview of the range of work that LAFs are involved with as well as some challenges they face. This report will be passed to the Minister so that he is aware of the good work LAFs are doing.

LAFs provide a local level body of expertise on matters relating to public access and outdoor recreation. They are a great example of localism in action. By bringing together volunteers from a range of backgrounds and interests, the LAFs demonstrate relevance to local decisions relating to a range of social, economic and environmental issues. The work of LAFs to encourage improvement to greenspace, other open access and connecting routes is important in helping to enable a healthier population, contributes to quality of life, creates opportunities for children to learn more about the natural world around them and contributes to local economic growth by attracting visitors to explore the landscapes, wildlife and heritage in an area. The best and most sustainable achievements involve working in partnership across sectors and in the coming year we look to LAFs to develop relationships with Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Boards. There are many examples where this is beginning to happen and where the respective groups are finding common purpose.

There is certainly a wealth of expertise within LAFs to share with other bodies but also plenty to share with other LAFs. The conference at the end of February 2013 facilitated the exchange of knowledge and we, in Natural England, want to build on that momentum to support LAFs to continue to share good practice whether through contributions to a newsletter, by adding material to a new section on Huddle or through circulating ideas at the LAF Regional Chair meetings.

I look forward to hearing more about the good work in the year ahead.



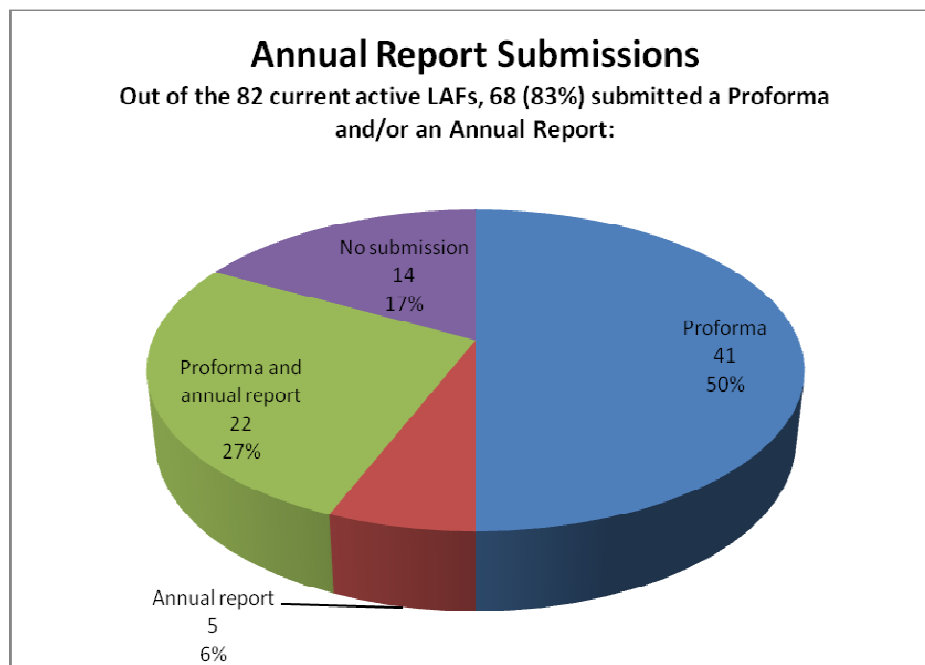
Liz Newton  
Natural England Director, Access and Engagement

## 1. Introduction

Natural England has responsibilities set out in the CROW Act (section 19 of the 2007 regulations) to receive annual reports from all LAFs. This report summarises all of the LAF annual reports received covering the period April 2011 to March 2012. The report provides statistics on LAFs and the activities they have undertaken, highlights some of the achievements reported, identifies issues and makes recommendations on improvements that could be made.

A revised reporting period was introduced to allow LAFs time to compile their annual reports. The reporting year end is 31<sup>st</sup> March with the submission deadline of 31 October. The LAF Regional Coordinators produced summary reports for their region which have been used to inform this report.<sup>1</sup>

The LAFs were asked to submit an annual report to Natural England ideally using a proforma provided. The final submission results are as follows:



## 2. Examples and details of some individual LAF achievements

LAFs have engaged in and influenced a wide range of consultation processes which are summarised in section 3.

A detailed selection of LAF good practice that has helped to achieve access benefits for local communities is set out below:

**Cumbria LAF** - Worked closely with partners from Natural England to make sure the Coastal Access Path worked well. They reported that a positive model for working together had been developed which will make developing further stages of the coast path much easier.

<sup>1</sup> Reports from Regional Coordinators have been placed on Huddle

**Lancashire LAF** - Work started on the Pennine Bridleway before the LAF existed but in recent years the LAF had been actively involved in its creation and development. The LAF reported that the experience of involvement with stage 1 allowed them to be more proactive on alignment of stage 2 of the National Trail.

**Rotherham LAF** - The rights of way team allocated £20,000 of the annual budget to the Local Access Forum to spend on countryside access improvements including: installing/fixing kissing gates, waymarkers, fingerposts, vegetation clearance and resurfacing.

**Buckinghamshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire LAFs** have been significant consultees with regard to the HS2 railway. Through meeting representatives from HS2, the LAFs have secured assurances of a better deal for access and rights of way along the line. Mark Bailey, Deputy Head of Environment for HS2 and his Team said he had been very impressed by the engagement, feedback, local knowledge and debate from Warwickshire Local Access Forum in respect of managing access and rights of way issues in the run up to HS2's Environmental Impact Assessment.

**Cambridgeshire LAF** - LAF members worked with the Wildlife Trust to assess disabled access to the Greater Fen Project, to highlight any access risks and develop a plan for future improvements, including improvements to the building and the removal of gradients too steep for wheelchair access.

**Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF)** - In 2010 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded the Hampshire Countryside Access Forum (HCAF) £46,600 for the Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage (PATHH) project. The New Forest National Park Authority provided an additional £5,000. A Project Officer was employed to take the project forward, overseen by a Steering Committee led by HCAF members. The project was completed by the end of 2012, and succeeded in gathering research by over 100 volunteers for routes with strong historical evidence, but which also meet a modern need, as identified in the Countryside Access Plans. The project delivered workshops in 13 schools (29 classes, 820 children), an exhibition at 24 venues, and over 17 talks to interest groups.

HCAF has continued to monitor the Hampshire Countryside Access Plan (CAP) delivery and members are present on each of the CAP working groups. Working group progress reports were received at a number of HCAF meetings, and the Forum provided advice on best practice for the running of the groups. The HCAF has also contributed to project work, led by the Area Countryside Access Managers. This included a workshop to develop key messages to feature on a leaflet to promote the responsible use of byways. This is part of an initiative with the Community Safety Team.

**Swindon Countryside Access Forum (SCAF)** – The SCAF has worked on developing a local statistical evidence base, using data largely derived from MENE analysis. This concept has been modelled on the Wiltshire 'Joint Strategic Assessment' initiative which aims to produce "a single version of the truth" upon which policy decisions can be made. The SCAF consider that for its advice to be influential it must adhere to the same quantitative rigour that the local authority

adopts towards its other decision making processes. Initial analysis has focused on benchmarking Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator 1.16 and the level of people walking generally throughout Wiltshire and Swindon. The aim of this first study is to provide evidence to support the transfer of funding from the Health budget to pay for infrastructure improvements in the rights of way network, particularly targeted in areas of highest health inequality.

**JLAF (Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset and South Glos)** – JLAF has worked with local authorities on the Outdoors West programme, to develop and publish a website at [www.OutdoorsWest.org.uk](http://www.OutdoorsWest.org.uk) as a first stop for information on the outdoors in the area. This is designed to be an attractive approachable website with mapping and information that people want, with the main aim to increase use of public rights of way. The website also holds background information and advice on public rights of way, access to mapping of furniture (stiles, gates, signs) on routes, and a system to allow online reporting of problems on the path network.

A JLAF working group has advised on the website content and approach, particularly helping to compile a routes database which has involved surveying routes, writing directions and plotting maps. This section of the website is still under construction, but will be a valuable database of attractive, reliable routes for people to explore the area. Other organisations such as the Cotswold AONB, National Trust, Health Walks and Museums are also involved in providing routes for the website.

The JLAF has extended the Cotswolds AONB Voluntary Warden service across the whole of the JLAF area. With start-up funding from Natural England, volunteer teams have been established to carry out on-site tasks such as vegetation clearance, kissing gate installation, as well as step and surface repair and installation.

### 3. Common consultations and activities that LAFs have been involved with over the year

Local Consultations	National Consultations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highway Orders</li> <li>• Green Infrastructure Strategies</li> <li>• Planning applications</li> <li>• Gating orders</li> <li>• Local Transport Plans and traffic management schemes</li> <li>• PROW network and projects</li> <li>• Forestry Panel, the proposed boundary review of the Yorkshire Dales NP and the Lake District NP</li> <li>• Definitive map modification orders</li> <li>• ROWIP planning and objectives</li> <li>• Connect 2 and other cycle projects</li> <li>• Disabled access</li> <li>• Core Strategies</li> <li>• Dog exclusion, dogs on leads, dog fouling orders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Coastal Access Trail - involved in the development of the (NW)</li> <li>• National Park Partnership Plans</li> <li>• National Planning Policy Framework consultation</li> <li>• Public Forest Estate consultations</li> <li>• Independent Panel on Forestry</li> <li>• Commons grazing proposals</li> <li>• The Natural Choice – The Natural Environment White Paper</li> <li>• Ministerial letter to Local Access Forums – responses</li> <li>• Defra’s key discussion document ‘An Invitation to Shape the Nature of England’</li> <li>• Big Conversation public</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing development schemes</li> <li>• Local Nature Partnerships</li> <li>• Recording of paths and promoting use</li> <li>• Flood defence works - Environment Agency consultations and planning applications regarding</li> <li>• Local development frameworks and planning strategies</li> <li>• Expiring permissive agreements under Higher Level Stewardship schemes - assessing the value and future of and liaison with landowners to improve access</li> <li>• Multi-use design criteria (Devon CAF)</li> <li>• Improvement of access through the PIGS scheme (Parish Improvement Grant Scheme)</li> <li>• Slipways and landing stages - public access to</li> <li>• Higher access rights to publicly owned land and the disposal and development of land owned by the Council.</li> <li>• Parish Council or local improvement grant schemes</li> <li>• Olympic mountain biking venue at Hadleigh - ELAF responded to Essex County Council's consultation</li> <li>• Shoreline Management Plans - ELAF to Environment Agency's - Essex and Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan</li> <li>• Rail Freight Interchange Strategic development</li> <li>• Network Rail and Rail Crossing Closures</li> <li>• Access and nature conservation</li> <li>• The definitive map and dedication of Land and Routes.</li> <li>• Horse routes and equestrian provision</li> <li>• Multi user routes - Balancing provision for</li> <li>• National Parks – Peak LAF have strong presence in all Park matters</li> <li>• Coastal Access / South West Coast Path</li> </ul>	<p>consultation about savings needed as a result of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review</p>
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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access activities: walking, horse riding, cycling, running, paragliding, climbing, fishing; outdoor pursuits; conservation activities; wildlife watching; farming and land management, motorised vehicular access; Community transport; activities for guides and scouts; rural small business; coastal access; urban access; access for all and more</li> <li>• Motorised vehicle access</li> <li>• Access to MOD Land</li> <li>• New Town &amp; Village Green Registration government consultation</li> <li>• Moving Inland Waterways into a Charity in England and Wales' by Defra</li> <li>• National Planning Policy Framework - Advice to Government on the draft</li> <li>• Simplifying Traffic Orders consultations - Comments to the Government</li> <li>• Highways Agency consultations</li> <li>• Revisions to the Countryside Code</li> </ul> |  |
|--|--|

## 4. National Achievements

### 4.1 Huddle: internet based network to share information

To help enable LAFs countrywide to work together and share good practice, ***and to facilitate communication with Natural England and Defra***, a LAF workspace was set up on the Defra Huddle website. This was trialled with the eight LAF Regional Coordinators, then rolled out gradually to LAF members. Initially this was to one 'Huddle Champion' per LAF which was expanded to three per LAF by March 2012.

- Number of LAFs represented on Huddle by March 2012 = **63 (76%)**
- Number of LAF members on Huddle by March 2012 = **121**



## 4.2 LAF conferences

In 2011/12, two national conferences were organised by Natural England in Newcastle and Bristol with speakers from Defra/Natural England, workshops and a video address from Richard Benyon to the LAFs. LAF representation was:

- Total LAFs represented = **73 (89%)**
- Total LAF member attendees = **79**

## 4.3 LAF annual work programmes

LAFs are encouraged to prepare annual work programmes and most reported that they were successful in meeting the objectives they had set themselves although in some instances work did not progress as swiftly as initially desired. A list of the typical work areas covered by most LAFs can be found in section 3. These mostly involved providing advice on:

- national consultations such as the National Planning Policy Framework or the Independent Panel on Forestry; or
- local consultations such as planning applications, RoWIPs or highway orders;
- Access restriction cases from Natural England.

## 5. Issues Identified by LAFs

It is important to remember that whilst LAFs are advisory bodies established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, they are run by volunteers. The current economic climate affects both the LAFs and the public sector that supports and works with them resulting in some frustrations and concerns. The proforma provided to LAFs for their annual reporting included sections for LAFs to list some of the issues they faced over the year along with their suggestions and ideas that could possibly help with some of these in the future.

Issues Raised by LAFs	NE/ Defra Response
Local authority funding cuts and restructuring have resulted in reduced staff time to support LAFs in holding regular meetings and in officers being less familiar with LAFs and the role they need to play.	Publication of 'Engagement Plan' that sets out respective roles and responsibilities
Pressure on budgets to improve and maintain access.	Promote 'good practice' sharing via Huddle and Newsletter. Continue to promote P4C via LAF networks as possible source of funding.
Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act lists the bodies that must have regard to relevant advice provided by a LAF. However there is a lack of awareness about this obligation amongst some of the bodies listed.	NE will circulate new newsletter to S94 bodies and remind them of the need to consult with LAFs.
General lack of awareness of LAFs and	NE will produce and circulate the Annual

Issues Raised by LAFs	NE/ Defra Response
their activity at local and national levels.	Report and a quarterly Newsletter.  NE to set up 'good practice' sites on huddle across a range of issues.
Frustration in consulting on matters within the defined statutory time period and coinciding with LAF meetings.	LAFs to share good practice (are there lessons to be learned from other voluntary groups?). Consider other ways to communicate between meetings.
The highway authority backlog of Legal Event Orders is frustrating for LAFs who provide advice and then often see no progress for some time.	The package of recommendations of the Stakeholder Working Group will streamline the process and allow the definitive map cut off date to be commenced. Local communities should hold local authorities to account for their spending decisions and priorities.
Many Forums struggle to engage with certain sections of society, in particular young people and black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. A couple of forums also mention inability to attract candidates from disabled user groups and/or individuals. One LAF is struggling with representation from land management / farmers and one would like to see some local business interest too.	LAFs to share good practice on engaging with communities and encouraging new volunteers to join the forum.
Lack of time to look at Huddle for complex consultations	Share Good practice such as requesting the LAF Secretary summarise issues on Huddle at meetings.
For those LAFs with wide geographical areas, the distances involved in travelling to meetings can be a barrier for members attending meetings, especially in the winter months when the weather can be inclement.  Meetings too can be lengthy with too many Agenda items.	Chairs and secretaries to note the need to seek ways of making it easier for members to attend meetings (rotating location perhaps) and to ensure agendas are managed effectively.  Local authorities to consider training and development where required.
LAFs would value some training on MENE and on the use of ecosystems services valuations.	Natural England conference presentation on Huddle and NE web site. RCs are encouraged to lead on helping LAFs with specific enquiries. NE is developing a toolkit to help individuals to use MENE which RCs will be briefed on.
Request for briefing from Defra on the implications of the "localism" agenda for LAFs.	The Localism Act was introduced in November 2011 and devolved more decision making powers to individuals, communities and councils. LAFs are an example of localism in action.

Issues Raised by LAFs	NE/ Defra Response
Continued support for national training and specifically on equal access to the countryside and dedicated work under the new Equality Act.	Natural England is currently surveying LAF Chairs and Secretaries for their views on LAF's national training needs and will consider how these can be met through a combination of briefings, guidance, bespoke training and events. Local authorities are required to provide reasonable training for LAF members.
LAFs need more regular communication from Natural England both through feedback from this annual reporting process, in replying to correspondence and through feedback from LAF consultations.	Natural England is producing an annual report to Defra/Minister and will circulate this to all LAF members via the Chairs and Secretaries. Natural England provides a summary of the results of all consultations on its web site and will ensure LAFs are aware of this. Natural England has a Customer Service Standard to acknowledge all correspondence within 10 working days and to provide a full response within an appropriate time scale.
Concern re the impact of changes to HLS and those with agreed permissive routes on sites.	Natural England will brief LAFs on changes to agri-environment funding that impact on public access to the natural environment.
Open Access Restrictions – changes in staff structures at Natural England meant that a local person was no longer able to go along to meetings to explain issues. Natural England is now offering teleconferencing as well as information by email, however joining in is not considered easy by LAF members as they are not confident with the technology or familiar with the process for the meetings.	Natural England staff that deal with open access restrictions cover large areas of the country. It will continue to be necessary to provide information by teleconference or email. Teleconference would be to a LAF meeting and the Secretary will be encouraged to make this facility available.

Martin Shaw, Natural England 29<sup>th</sup> May 2013

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>SLAF Annual Report 2011-2012</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

## **Suffolk Local Access Forum**

### **Annual Report – August 2011 – July 2012**

#### **Introduction**

1. As required by the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002 I have pleasure in submitting the ninth Annual Report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum to Suffolk County Council as the highway authority.
2. The Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) was formed under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) in 2003. SLAF acts as an independent body to advise the Council on matters relating to rights of way and access to the countryside. It is also a statutory consultee for Natural England on mapping of open country and plans and policies produced by a wide range of organisations. The forum is administered by the Rights of Way and Access team, Suffolk County Council.
3. The forum is made up from those interested in access to the countryside and rights of way including users, landowners, land managers, members of community organisations and those with conservation interests.
4. Full membership for 2011/12 is listed in Appendix B (not attached).

#### **Our Work**

5. The forum met at quarterly intervals in 2011/12 to discuss a range of issues that have arisen from consultations, presentations, papers, reports and site visits from amongst others, Suffolk County Council, DEFRA, Natural England, Highways Agency, Network Rail, the Independent Panel on Forestry, Babergh District Council, Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership and the Forestry Commission.
6. Members of the public are able to attend meetings and have the opportunity to raise items or comment on issues discussed or related to countryside access.
7. Local parish councils are alerted to SLAF meetings in their area and invited to attend.
8. Members of SLAF attend regional meetings and conferences and neighbouring local access forums to improve access in Suffolk.

## SLAF Cost

9. SLAF have their own identity to ensure they are clearly recognisable as an independent body with letter heading with PO address box, an independent email address and a dedicated website on the One Suffolk platform - <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>
10. The cost for servicing SLAF for 2011-12 was approximately £2,000. This includes secretariat, room hire and member travel expenses. To place this in context, the overall budget for Countryside Access is £1.2M.

## Investment in Rights of Way

11. The forum congratulates officers on delivering improvements to public rights of way and countryside access in partnership with Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area's of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) through the BALANCE Project. BALANCE is a £500k (approx) European match-funded project to manage visitors in environmentally sensitive landscapes. Rights of Way and Access have £100k (approx) of funding to deliver access improvements within the AONB. The key BALANCE access project is improving the Sailors Path (a long distance footpath between Aldeburgh and Snape) for accessibility, including wheelchair users.
12. The forum congratulates officers in delivering significant improvements to access in partnership with St Edmundsbury Borough Council Growth Area Funding. This funding is delivering improvements along the Lark Valley Path, north of Bury St Edmunds, for safe, off-road cycling.
13. The forum congratulates officers in delivering Natural England Community Funding to improve access and awareness of open access sites.
14. The forum welcomes investment in public rights of way through Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3), although are concerned this concentrates resources in urban locations.
15. The forum is concerned that within a predominantly rural county access improvements are difficult to fund in rural locations. The forum suggests that relatively low cost solutions can be delivered with rights of way improvement schemes providing a positive impact on people's quality of life, health benefits and the rural economy.
16. The forum is encouraged that officers are proactively working with community groups to develop ideas to bid to Natural England's new fund, Paths for Communities. This fund will enable the creation of new rights of way and promotion of countryside access.

## Rights of Way Severance

17. SLAF is pleased that the needs of non-motorised users were incorporated into designs for the dualling of the A11.
18. However, the forum was very concerned about the intention to reduce the height of the bridleway underpass near Elveden Monument, adversely affecting its use for horse riders.

19. The forum pressed the Highways Agency on this and is delighted that they have altered the underpass design to accommodate horse riders, without the need to dismount.
20. The forum is also very concerned with Network Rail's approach to rights of way level crossings and the lack of coordination by Network Rail with a policy of closing crossings as a first option. SLAF question this approach when alternative, more suitable options may be available to improve public access.
21. SLAF received a presentation from NR on this policy and pressed the case for improving public access, not losing it.
22. SLAF supports the work of officers, especially with the Suffolk Road Rail Partnership, to improve access at a number of key crossing points.
23. The forum continues to support SCC and Sustrans' efforts in securing and improving access at the location of the Ipswich Chord.

### **Future of the Public Forest Estate**

24. The forum welcomed the formation of the Independent Panel on Forestry to advise government on the future of the Public Forest Estate.
25. The role of the Independent Panel on Forestry was crucial to future decisions about the Public Forest Estate and SLAF was keen to be invited to a visit by the panel to East Anglia. SLAF worked closely with the Norfolk Local Access Forum prior to the visit to discuss a joint approach. The visit took place on 28 March 2012 and SLAF was able to make representation to the panel.
26. The panel published their Final Report in July 2012 and the forum broadly welcome their vision for the future of forests and woodlands in England.
27. However, the forum remain concerned about the future of the Public Forest Estate and the opportunity it offers the public for improved quality of life, health benefits, learning and contribution to the local rural economy.
28. The forum are disappointed the panel did not take the opportunity to propose the dedication of higher rights of access to meet the needs of equestrians and cyclists. The forum has expressed this view to MPs.

### **Babergh's Green Infrastructure Framework**

29. The forum welcome the opportunity to participate in developing Babergh's Green Infrastructure Framework to preserve and enhance countryside access in the district and play a role in helping the district decide on the level of its Community Infrastructure Levy.

### **Norfolk and Suffolk Local Nature Partnership**

30. The forum was encouraged to be involved at a very early stage in the consultation process to develop a Norfolk and Suffolk Local Nature Partnership (LNP).
31. The LNP 'Wild Anglia' gained approval from DEFRA in July 2012 and the forum are keen to be represented on the new board, ensuring that countryside access is a key issue for the new partnership.

## Open Access

32. SLAF congratulates the Council in obtaining funds and delivering improvements with Natural England's Community Funding to develop signage of open access sites across the county. This project involved working with partners including National Trust, RSPB and volunteers to raise awareness of sites.
33. SLAF support the retention of extended restrictions on five open access sites beyond the standard March-July period to keep dogs on short fixed leads in the month of August to protect ground nesting birds.
34. SLAF are concerned over the cessation of open access funding by Natural England resulting in the loss of a warden to monitor open access sites across Suffolk.

## Other Issues

35. **Communication between Local Access Forums:** The forum was concerned with the loss of the England Access Forum as a national voice for Local Access Forums and expressed these concerns to Natural England. SLAF welcome the continued role of a Regional Local Access Forum Coordinator but have expressed their reservations to Natural England about replacing the England Access Forum with Huddle, an on-line resource. Access to Huddle is restricted to five members per forum and SLAF are concerned this places an unnecessary, additional burden on those members whilst limiting the scope for other members to be aware or involved with other forums on key issues.
36. **Coastal Path:** The forum is interested in the progress of a Coastal Path nationally and very interested in the lessons being learned developing coastal access in Norfolk. SLAF remain concerned that a key feature of Suffolk's coastline, its estuaries, will prevent a continual coastal route and SLAF will press Natural England to enable the Coastal Path to continue along estuaries to the first permanent crossing point.
37. **Ipswich Waterfront:** SLAF support the work of officers in securing public access along Ipswich Waterfront.
38. **Countryside sites:** The forum is pleased with the progress of dedicating rights of way on countryside sites previously managed by SCC.

## Consultations

39. SLAF has been consulted on:
  - a) SCC's Budget Consultation;
  - b) Future of the Public Forest Estate (DEFRA/Independent Panel on Forestry);
  - c) Local Nature Partnerships (Suffolk Biodiversity Partnership);
  - d) Review of Open Access Restrictions (Natural England);
  - e) Draft National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government);
  - f) Consultation on Town and Village Green Registration (DEFRA); and

- g) National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) developing guidance on walking and cycling (Department of Health).

### **Meetings**

40. SLAF members have attended meetings on:
- a) 20 July 2011 – Norfolk Local Access Forum, attended by Bryan Collen (Chair) to discuss a shared approach to the visit to East Anglia of the Independent Panel on Forestry;
  - b) 22 November 2011 – East of England Local Access Forum Chair and Vice Chair meeting, Cambridge, attended by Bryan Collen (Chair) to raise issues that SLAF have focused on and to develop closer working relationships with other forums;
  - c) 20 January 2012 – A11 Dualling, attended by David Barker (Vice Chair) to press case for design of new underpass to accommodate horse riders;
  - d) 28 February 2012 – National Local Access Forum Conference, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, attended by Barry Hall;
  - e) 28 March 2012 – Independent Panel on Forestry visit to East Anglia. SLAF was represented by Alan Moore. The visit took place at Green Light Trust's offices in Lawshall;
  - f) 25 April 2012 – Babergh Green Infrastructure Framework, Sudbury, attended by Cllr Jane Storey; and
  - g) 28 May 2012 – Local Nature Partnerships, National Trust Ickworth House, attended by Melinda Appleby.

### **Presentations**

41. SLAF received presentations on:
- a) 20 October 2011 – Local Nature Partnerships, Gen Broad, Biodiversity Officer for Suffolk;
  - b) 12 January 2012 – Rights of Way Crossings on Railway Lines, Steve Day, Liability Negotiations Advisor, Network Rail;
  - c) 12 January 2012 – Future of Public Forest Estate, Mike Taylor, Forestry Commission;
  - d) 12 April 2012 – Natural England presentation on Coastal Access, Huddle and Paths for Communities provided by Lynda Foster, Natural England; and
  - e) 12 July 2012 – Natural England presentation on use of Huddle on-line forum, provided by Anna Mangini, Regional Local Access Forum Coordinator.

### **Site Visits**

- 42. 12 April 2012 – Orford Quay, to see pilot scheme on sea wall to address erosion on a sea defence which carries a public footpath.
- 43. 12 April 2012 – Southwold, to see development of a new bridleway adjacent to a river wall to provide a route for cyclists travelling between Southwold and Walberswick.



44. 12 July 2012 – Ipswich Waterfront to see issues regarding public access along quayside.

### **Training**

45. 26 January 2012 – Huddle. Margaret Hancock attended training on the use of Huddle, an on-line resource for Local Access Forum members provided by DEFRA and administered by Natural England. Training was provided by the Regional Local Access Forum Coordinator at Constantine House, Ipswich.

### **Membership of SLAF**

46. During the past year there have been four meetings, all of which were very well attended.
47. DEFRA guidance advises Local Access Forum membership can be between 10 and 22 members.
48. At the start of this year SLAF membership was 16 members. One member resigned during the year and six members renewed. Membership currently stands at 15 members.
49. A full membership list for 2011/12 is provided in Appendix B.

### **Looking Ahead**

50. The practice of making site visits to complement meeting agendas, meet key partners and see issues relating to access in situ will continue.
51. Priorities for SLAF over the coming year include:
- a) Ensuring the county council budget for rights of way and wider access continues to be sufficient to deliver a viable service and rights of way improvement plan priorities;
  - b) Severance of public access along rights of way by road and rail networks;
  - c) The future of the Public Forest Estate and preserving and enhancing public access;
  - d) The recognition of public access in the policies and development plans of other organisations; and
  - e) The development of the Definitive Map.

### **Main Recommendations for Suffolk County Council to consider are:**

52. The Suffolk Local Access Forum welcomes the continued support given by Suffolk County Council to public rights of way and countryside access. The forum stress upon the council the importance of access for providing sustainable travel options, helping the rural economy and tourism and providing physical and mental health benefits. The forum reiterate that investing in public rights of way and access, in maintaining the network, making small scale improvements and promoting access, provides value for money with modest expenditure reaping considerable benefits to the public and boosting the tourism offer of the county.
53. The forum is pleased that the Highways Agency has backed down on its proposal to reduce the height of the bridleway underpass on the A11 dualling designs and thereby retain full height, providing access between rights of way

and areas of open access either side of the A11. However, the forum remains greatly concerned that severance of rights of way by railways and trunk roads elsewhere in the county is not being adequately addressed. The forum urges the Council to press Network Rail and the Highways Agency to seek suitable solutions to severance, where possible.

54. The forum welcomed the formation of the Independent Panel on Forestry to advise government on the future of the Public Forest Estate. The forum broadly welcomed the Independent Panel on Forestry vision for the future of forests and woodlands in England. However, the forum was disappointed the panel did not take the opportunity to propose the dedication of higher rights of access to meet the need of equestrians and cyclists. The forum has expressed this view to MPs.
55. The Suffolk Local Access Forum is keen that countryside access is protected, maintained and enhanced across Suffolk, and welcomed their involvement in developing a green infrastructure strategy for Babergh District Council and their future involvement in the Suffolk and Norfolk local nature partnership 'Wild Anglia'.
56. The Suffolk Local Access Forum recognise the importance of developing the Definitive Map to be responsive to customer's needs and requests the Council to continue supporting this area and maintaining the ability to extinguish, divert and create public rights of way where needed.
57. The Suffolk Local Access Forum is an efficient, balanced and cost-effective forum providing an important advisory service to the Council and other organisations by raising issues regarding how the public access the countryside and use the public rights of way network for leisure, health and sustainable travel options.

**Bryan Collen**

Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

**David Barker**

Vice Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

**July 2012**

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>DRAFT SLAF Annual Report 2012-2013</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

Below is the draft SLAF Annual Report 2012-2013

### **Introduction**

1. As required by the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002 I have pleasure in submitting the tenth Annual Report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum to Suffolk County Council as the highway authority.
2. The Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) was formed under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) in 2003. SLAF acts as an independent body to advise the Council on matters relating to public rights of way and countryside access. It is also a statutory consultee for Natural England on mapping of open access land and plans and policies produced by a wide range of organisations, including Defra, Highways Agency and Network Rail.
3. The forum is administered by the Rights of Way and Countryside Access team, Suffolk County Council.
4. The forum is made up of individuals with an interest in rights of way and countryside access including members of community organisations, users (walkers, cyclists, horse riders), landowners and land managers, and those with conservation interests.
5. Full membership of SLAF for the period August 2012 – July 2013 is listed in Appendix B (*not attached*).

### **The Work of SLAF**

6. The forum meet quarterly each year to discuss and respond to a wide range of issues. Issues arise from consultations, presentations, papers, reports and site visits. Responses in this period have been made to Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board, National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), Ministry of Defence, Defra, Natural England, Highways Agency, Network Rail, EDF (Sizewell C), Norfolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Forest Heath District Council, and Quiet Lanes Initiative.
7. Members of SLAF attended local and regional meetings and national conferences.
8. Members of the public are welcome to attend SLAF meetings and have the opportunity to raise items or comment on issues discussed or related to countryside access.

9. Local parish councils are advised of SLAF meetings in their area and are invited to attend.

### **The Cost of SLAF**

10. SLAF retain their own identity to be clearly recognisable as an independent body. The forum have their own letter heading with PO address, an independent email address and a dedicated website on the One Suffolk platform - <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>
11. The cost of administering SLAF for 2012-13 was approximately £1,100. This includes room hire, member travel expenses and site visits. To place this in context, the overall budget for Rights of Way and Countryside Access is £1.2M.

### **Investment in Rights of Way and Countryside Access**

12. The forum support and welcome the efforts of officers to deliver improvements to public rights of way and countryside access. Specifically, the forum congratulates officers on the completion of the Sailors Path Project, the delivery of new access at Aldeburgh Golf Club, and the delivery of the Lark Valley Path project.
13. The forum welcome the success of officers in securing significant funding from Department of Transport Cyclist Safety Fund. This will provide a safe cycle route along rights of way between Mildenhall and West Row (£200k), and a cycle bridge linking public rights of way in Bury St Edmunds (£2m).
14. The forum support efforts by officers to secure funding to develop countryside access in partnership with the Brecks Partnerships' Heritage Lottery Fund bid 'Breaking New Ground'.
15. The forum has concerns that access improvements tend to be focused on urban locations with less focus on rural areas. The forum urge the council to recognise that improving public rights of way can offer low cost solutions to encourage walking and cycling to access services, facilities and the wider countryside.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

16. The forum congratulate the Suffolk Wellbeing Board for developing A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk.
17. The forum share the Board's vision for people in Suffolk to live healthier and happier lives and consider that countryside access should play a key role in achieving that vision and make a positive contribution to Suffolk's ambition to become England's 'Most Active County'.
18. The forum strongly believes that improving and promoting countryside access can play a key role and offer a low cost approach in achieving the Strategy's outcomes, with specific relevance to a number of Key Measures (Indicators).
19. In making decision on Health and Wellbeing priorities for Suffolk, including joint commissioning, spending public money and developing Annual Action Plans, the Suffolk Local Access Forum would like the Board to use countryside access in a key role.
20. The Forum would also like Annual Action Plans to recognise the role public rights of way play in providing safe routes to schools, services and facilities. In

addition, the Forum would like to ensure that those Key Measures (Indicators) against each outcome that relate to green space, focus not only on managed green infrastructure, such as town and country parks, but also include the natural environment, accessible on public rights of way and through Open Access Land.

### **Rights of Way Severance**

21. The forum have been kept advised by the Highways Agency of works on the A11 dualling at Barton Mills. The forum look forward to visiting the works in Autumn 2013 and to the opening of the new bridleway underpass near Elveden Monument.
22. The forum is concerned that Network Rail have a national initiative to address high risk crossing on the rail infrastructure, which in Suffolk has resulted in pressure to close or divert rights of way crossings, when alternative measures could mitigate issues. These include changing approaches, improving decking, clearing trackside vegetation, adding warning lights, or installing grade separated crossings.
23. SLAF supports the work of officers with the Suffolk Road Rail Partnership, to improve access at a number of key crossing points.

### **Other Issues**

24. **Ipswich Northern Fringe:** The forum expressed concern to Ipswich Borough Council on the large scale development proposed in the north of Ipswich and the need to protect and enhance the Fonneraeu Way and ensure safe links were made between the development, rail stations, schools, managed green space, Ipswich and the wider rights of way network.
25. **'Wild Anglia':** The forum is being kept informed of the development of the Local Nature Partnership 'Wild Anglia'. The forum are concerned about how access will be represented in the new organisation and that it will be overshadowed by conservation interests. The forum request that access if represented effectively on the board of Wild Anglia and within working groups.
26. **Open Access:** The forum were pleased NE agreed to lift seasonal restrictions at Horn Heath due to the absence of threatened bird species, as per their policy. Horn Heath sits alongside the route of the dualled A11 with access close by the location of the new bridleway underpass by the Elveden Monument. This contributes positively to improved countryside access in the area.
27. **Coastal Access:** The forum has followed the development of Coastal Access with keen interest and in the lessons learned by Norfolk County Council with specific regard to diversions around private property and how far inland routes go. SLAF remain concerned that a key feature of Suffolk's coastline, its estuaries, will prevent a continual coastal route and SLAF will press Natural England to enable the Coastal Path to continue along estuaries to the first permanent crossing point.
28. **Communication between Local Access Forums:** The forum welcomes the recruitment of a regional coordinator to disseminate information and provide communication between the forum and Natural England. Forum members have

not signed up to use the online resource provided by Natural England 'Huddle' due to issues with rural broadband or other work pressures.

29. **Ipswich Waterfront:** SLAF support the work of officers in securing public access along Ipswich Waterfront.

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

The following letter was sent to the Director of Public Health by SLAF in response to the publication of A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk

**SLAF**  
**Suffolk Local Access Forum**

Tessa Lindfield  
The Director of Public Health  
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Date: 19 June 2013

Dear Tessa Lindfield

**Re: A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk**

The Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) is an independent advisory body established under section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to advise Suffolk County Council on matters relating to countryside access and public rights of way. The Forum addresses ways to improve public access and open-air recreation, including walking, cycling and horseriding, for the benefit of all.

The Forum would like to congratulate the Suffolk Wellbeing Board for developing A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk. We share the Board's vision for people in Suffolk to live healthier and happier lives. We consider that countryside access should play a key role in achieving that vision.

As the strategy states, countryside access benefits physical, mental and social wellbeing. In a county with an increasingly ageing population, areas of deprivation and inequality gaps, countryside access, and opportunities for walking especially, can improve people's quality of

life. This can make a positive contribution to Suffolk's ambition to become England's 'Most Active County'.

The Suffolk Local Access Forum welcome the inclusion of outcomes within the strategy that relate to countryside access, specifically: Outcome Two with regard to the importance of green space, well planned and properly linked walking and cycling routes; Outcome Three, enabling people to choose healthy lifestyles; and Outcome Four, improving mental health and wellbeing.

Suffolk's countryside has been recognised as one of the county's greatest assets. Suffolk benefits from over 5,500km of public rights of way and over 25,000 hectares of Open Access and Forestry Land. Our county contains two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and numerous managed nature reserves, ancient woodlands and country parks.

The Forum strongly believes that improving and promoting countryside access can play a key role and offer a low cost approach in achieving the Strategy's outcomes. Developing more accessible public rights of way will create a countryside that is more accessible to all. The Forum would like to highlight three projects that focus on capital investment, promotion and events, to illustrate this.

1. The Sailors Path Project was delivered through BALANCE, a European funded partnership project between Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. The project resurfaced footpaths, replaced gates with accessible DDA compliant gates, widened boardwalks, installed distance signage and interpretation panels, and produced an 'Explorer Guide' to tell the story of the landscape, people and nature. These improvements have created a 4-mile accessible trail. Pre- and post-project surveys indicate increased use of the path of over 130%.
2. The Easy Going Trails Project was a partnership project between Suffolk County Council and the Access Group for Suffolk. This project produced a pack of 18 walks suitable for wheelchair users and accessible for all, promoting access to lesser known countryside locations. Focused distribution of packs via Optua, Stepping Out in Suffolk, Livewell Suffolk and others, ensures effective promotion to a target audience of people with physical and mental disabilities.
3. The Suffolk Walking Festival is a partnership project between Suffolk's county, borough and district councils. The 2013 Festival, launched by Councillor Mark Bee, attracted 1,200 participants, encouraging walking to new audiences and introducing many people to countryside locations new to them.

In making decision on Health and Wellbeing priorities for Suffolk, including joint commissioning, spending public money and developing Annual Action Plans, the Suffolk Local Access Forum would like the Board to build upon these examples of best practice, and, where appropriate, to use countryside access in a key role.

The Forum would also like Annual Action Plans to recognise the role public rights of way play in providing safe routes to schools, services and facilities. This is relevant to Outcome One. In addition, the Forum would like to ensure that those Key Measures (Indicators) against each outcome that relate to green space, focus not only on managed green



infrastructure, such as town and country parks, but also include the natural environment, accessible on public rights of way and through Open Access Land.

The Forum considers countryside access as being particularly relevant to Key Measures (Indicators) 1.1.7, 1.1.8, 1.2.2, 2.1.5, 2.2.3, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, and 3.2.3.

The Suffolk Local Access Forum welcomes the publication of A Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk and trusts the points above are accepted as constructive and helpful. The Forum is keen to be kept advised of the work of the Board. The Forum meets four times a year and would be happy to receive updates at their meetings.

Yours sincerely

Bryan Collen  
Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

The Triennial Review of the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) was launched on 12th December 2012. Stakeholders were invited to offer views on:-

1. the function and form of EA/NE,
2. changes that could be made to provide better quality outcomes for the environment, economy and society,
3. options for reform to the current delivery arrangements,
4. suggestions for alternative delivery options.

In total, 357 responses were received – 222 from individual members of the public and 135 from organisations.

The review drew mixed responses on what the ambition and core purpose of the agencies should be. Views centred on whether the core purpose should primarily be environmental, or if economic and social outcomes should be included.

There were comments that the agencies had competing priorities and tensions had arisen with environmental and economic issues, which had not been adequately addressed. EA and NE were also perceived to play a limited role on economic and social issues which impacted on their ability to address sustainable development.

The importance of retaining an independent voice for nature was a priority for many stakeholders and a champion for nature, independent of Government, was cited as being critically important. However, whether an advocacy function was appropriate for a delivery body was questioned.

Advice services were highlighted as an area of particular concern. There were problems with duplication between the agencies. Conflicts were seen to have led to confusion, inefficiency, and unnecessary bureaucracy.

Four key areas were addressed:

#### 1. Technical expertise

Technical knowledge and scientific evidence was highly valued, especially at the local-level. However, there was a perception that both EA and NE had lost technical expertise / capability in recent years which had left them exposed and this needed to be reversed. There were opportunities to draw on expertise of other organisations (at both regional and national level). Access to data was highlighted as an area for improvement.

## 2. Governance

NGOs especially stressed the importance of having a champion for nature, independent of Government and free from political interference. There was a need for culture change within EA/NE, and a greater focus on customers and customer service delivery.

## 3. Advice

Existing advice has faced criticism with areas of concern including accessibility of advice, high volume of 'interfaces', fragmented approach, and inconsistency between and within EA and NE.

## 4. Access and Engagement in Place

For some respondents, particularly NGOs and recreational organisations, access was regarded as an important part of core functions with some respondents commenting that EA/NE should not focus solely on environmental protection. High value was placed on EA/NE having strong local knowledge and expertise with greater links between staff and stakeholders and some respondents wanted consistent and trusting relationships between the bodies and end users through dedicated advisors.

Regarding the 2 scenarios for the future of EA and NE, responses were:

### Scenario 1 – two separate bodies

A number of stakeholders strongly supported retaining two bodies. This was to maintain a strong independent voice for nature; allow open debate between bodies about competing issues; minimises further risks from additional change; ensure continuity of delivery, and; maintain a strong focus on the natural environment. Some respondents stressed that improvements were needed and operational changes required to the way both bodies operate individually and collaboratively. Whilst some respondents supported at least some level of change, a few also highlight that any change should not impact on the bodies' ability to deliver their statutory duties.

### Scenario 2 – one single merged body

Those favouring a single merged body saw it as an opportunity to develop a single strategic joined up approach, minimise duplication, simplify the advice and delivery landscape, improve decision making, and provide consistency in approach. A number were firmly against the creation of a single body with concerns centred on whether particular functions would dominate at the expense of other functions (in particular those currently performed by NE). Strong concerns were expressed that a single body would lose a 'single, independent voice for nature'. The resource cost, disruption and upheaval of merger were concerns raised by a number of respondents.

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Breaking New Ground</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

The Brecks Partnership is developing a Heritage Lottery Fund bid. The Partnership was awarded a Stage 1 pass by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in late summer 2012, to further develop the £2.1m (total) Landscape Partnership project.

The Lottery funded project "Breaking New Ground" (<http://www.brecks.org/brecks-partnership/Breaking-New-Ground.aspx>), will focus on raising awareness of the landscape by connecting communities to the natural, archaeological and built heritage.

The next stage in the Heritage Lottery process is developing and submitting a full proposal.

Access projects have been presented by Suffolk County Council, Norfolk County Council and The Breckland Society. SCC's proposal focuses on improvements to the Lark Valley Path and promotion of the forthcoming A11 NMU underpass.

The Lark Valley Path project (£50,000) is to resurface 1.2km of the Lark Valley Path between West Stow Road and West Stow Country Park. This will improve access for less mobile, pushchairs and wheelchair users. The project would also complement work completed in 2013 resurfacing 2km of the Lark Valley Path between Fornham All Saints and Hengrave.

The Brecks Cycle Rides (£10,000) will promote use of the new bridleway underpass on the dualled A11. This offers the opportunity to develop an almost continuous off-road cycle link between Bury St Edmunds and Santon Downham. The Brecks Cycle Rides would complete a network of interlinked, off-road routes covering the west of Suffolk between Newmarket, Mildenhall and Bury St Edmunds.

NCC is focusing on developing a long distance trail along the Little Ouse. The Breckland Society is seeking to develop walks between clusters of heritage attractions.

All project proposals will be determined by end July 2013.

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Rights of Way and Rail Crossings – update</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>11 July 2013</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Steve Kerr</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Assington Village Hall</b>

This paper follows on from the report presented at the Forum's meeting on 12 April 2012. It provides updates on the work Network Rail (NR) and Suffolk County Council (SCC) have been doing on addressing priority rights of way crossings through the provision of grade separated facilities.

At that meeting the Forum were provided with a list showing NR's priority rights of way crossings within Suffolk, many of which were at that time, proposed to be diverted or closed. Some crossings were also identified as suitable for the provision of grade separated facilities, such as overbridges or underpasses.

The Suffolk Road Rail Partnership Sub Group met on 18 July 2012 and again on 23 January 2013. At the last meeting NR advised that they had revised their priority rankings and were now only looking to address six crossings in Suffolk. In addition to those listed below, these also include a proposed diversion of FP34 Wherstead, a potential closure or diversion of FP12 Barham and closure of FP18 Bentley. In addition, two of those originally identified as suitable for the provision of overbridges (Cattishall, Gt Barton and Keepers Lane, Trimley), have now been shelved, due to land acquisition issues.

Appendix 1 identifies the locations of the four crossings referred to below.

### **Great Barton BR 12**

NR have recently undertaken a preliminary consultation with SCC on the design for this bridleway/cycling ramped/stepped bridge (see Appendix 2). SCC is currently coordinating a response back to NR but does have concerns about the severe gradient proposed for the ramps (1:12), the 3m width and type of surface for the ramps themselves and the bridge decking, together with the need for equestrian parapets. At the request of SCC, NR will be consulting the parish council, user groups and the local county councillor on their ultimate design. There will also be a further general opportunity to submit comments at the planning application stage, as the structure footprint requires take up of non-NR owned land.

Sustrans have expressed concern about the extra length users will have to walk or cycle when using the ramps, as part of the accompanying proposed rail crossing diversion order. SCC considers this extra length to be acceptable when weighed against the safety risk of using the current at grade crossing. Indeed, the ramps will need to be even longer to accommodate a less severe gradient.

**Willow Walk (FP6 Needham Market/FP36 Creting St Mary)**

In February 2013 NR undertook an option selection report looking at both the Willow Walk and Gypsy Lane (U4657 / FP 39 Creting St Mary) crossings and concluded the most feasible option is for the provision of a subway at Willow Walk, followed by the permanent extinguishment of the Gypsy Lane crossing. A temporary closure is currently in force for Willow Walk.

SCC is in general agreement with the preferred option but has expressed concerns about the potential for the subway to be flooded and the significant works required to improve the connecting rights of way. NR have, or will be, undertaking consultations with local residents, user groups and other stakeholders through their Community Engagement team.

**FP 31 Felixstowe (Felixstowe Academy)**

As part of one of the planning conditions for the occupation of the new Felixstowe Academy, there was a requirement for FP31 to be either extinguished or diverted to a new grade separated facility.

SCC, in partnership with NR, is responsible for delivering the overbridge and the project needs to be completed by April 2014. The completion of the bridge will be followed by the permanent extinguishment of part of FP31. The bridge will be subsequently owned and maintained by NR. A short spur of additional footpath will be required across Flagship Housing land, to allow for access to the bridge approaches. This will be built to adoptable urban footpath standard and will include staggered metal barriers at its junction with Runnacles Way, as a safety measure to prevent the public and Academy pupils from straying onto the road.

The design of the bridge is currently under discussion, and whether ramps should be provided.

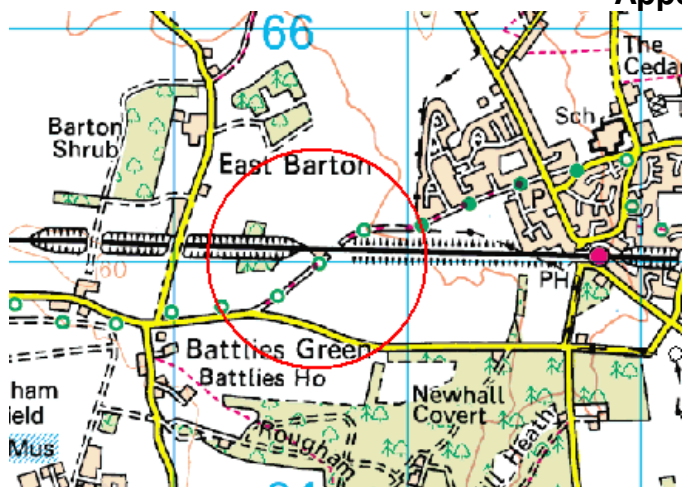
**Weatherby (Newmarket)**

Another crossing under discussion is the Weatherby crossing in Newmarket. This is not recorded as a highway of any description but is a well used crossing and has been used as a right of way over many years. In 2013 a joint funding proposal for an overbridge was submitted to SCC SCC is likely to request NR give greater consideration to providing safety improvements which allow the level crossing to remain open.

The county council will continue to work with NR to provide the most appropriate solution for each highway crossing. The local access forum will be provided with any updates as these become available.

END

Appendix 1 – location plans



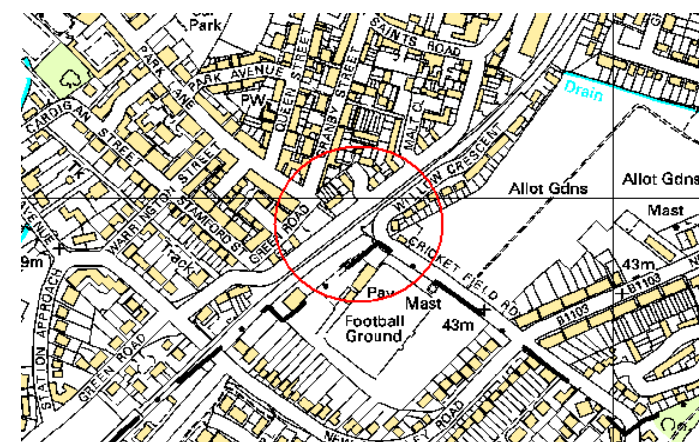
Great Barton public footpath 12



Felixstowe public footpath 31



Needham Market public footpath 6



Weatherby Crossing, Newmarket



Appendix 2

Proposed ramped overbridge design – Great Barton Bridleway 12

