

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Agenda
Meeting Date:	10 April 2014
Author/Contact:	David Falk
Venue:	Walberswick Village Hall

Paper Number

1.	10.00	Site Visit – Walberswick and Tidal Surge	
2.	12.30	Lunch – The Anchor, Walberswick	
3.	2.00	Welcome, apologies and housekeeping	
4.		Minutes of previous meeting	LAF 14/08
5.		Declaration of interest	
6.	2.10	Suffolk Estuary Defence and Right of Way Trial Trazar Astley-Reid, Suffolk Estuaries Officer, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB	Presentation LAF 14/09
7.	2.45	Sizewell C	Presentation
8.	3.15	Network Rail	LAF 14/10
9.	3.30	Update / Correspondence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National LAF Report • Regional LAF meeting • Natural England Open Access Statutory Review • NNR Westleton Heath • Letter from Dan Rogerson MP, DEFRA 	LAF 14/11 Verbal – DF Verbal – DF Verbal – DF LAF 14/12
10.	3.50	Member’s Topic/Any Other Business	
11.	3.55	Public question time	
12.	4.00	Dates & Venues of Future Meetings	

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Minutes of meeting held at West Suffolk House on 30 January 2014
Meeting Date:	10 April 2014
Author/Contact:	Jackie Gillis
Venue:	Walberswick

Suffolk Local Access Forum Induction

The meeting was preceded by an Induction for the new members; several current members also attended. Presentations were given by Andrew Woodin on public rights of way and access in Suffolk; Steve Kerr on the role of the definitive map team; Annette Robinson and Glyn French on the role of protecting and maintaining the network; David Falk on improving and promoting the network and access to the countryside.

1. Welcome, apologies and housekeeping

Present: Bryan Collen (Chair) (BC), David Barker (Vice-Chair) (DB), Melinda Appleby (MA), Annette Ellis (AE), Margaret Hancock (MH), Barry Hall (BH), Jane Hatton (JH), Cllr Diana Kersley (DK), Gordon Merfield (GM), Alan Moore (AM), Monica Pipe (MP), Cllr Jane Storey (JS), Roland Wilson (RW), Anthony Wright (AWR), Mike Taylor (MT), Richard Powell (RP).

SCC Officers Present: Jackie Gillis (minutes), David Falk (DF), Andrew Woodin (AW), Annette Robinson (AR).

Apologies: John Wayman (JW)

2. Minutes of previous meeting (LAF 13/30)

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

Matters arising: MA was concerned that permissive paths could be ploughed up with changes to stewardship schemes. DB advised the new stewardship schemes do not include permissive access. Some may remain in a loose arrangement. Lack of funding would mean some landowners will end permissive access.

3. Declaration of interest

AWr expressed an interest from Sustrans in agenda item 6 and 12.

4. Introductions

RP was welcomed to SLAF. RP said he was a geologist by trade and had previously been Regional Director of RSPB and then National Trust, and was now Chief Executive of Healthy Ambitions Suffolk. His passion is in creating landscapes of which he has created several, including RSPB Lakenheath Fen.

5. Wild Anglia

RP is the Chair of Wild Anglia. RP explained how Wild Anglia came into being receiving assistance from DEFRA and Natural England. The work of Wild Anglia underpins tourism and quality of life in this area. Wild Anglia's priorities include health and wellbeing, and access.

JS asked where its funding came from and was advised it was through sponsorships, grants and they were currently submitting a bid to the National Lottery.

AW noted SLAF had wanted to be represented on the board, and SCC was therefore very pleased that RP was a member of SLAF.

6. Network Rail (LAF 14/01, LAF 14/02, LAF 14/03)

BC and AW met with Cllr Graham Newman, Cabinet Member Roads and Transport to raise concerns over the railway crossings at Felixstowe and Needham Market. Network Rail refused to construct a crossing at Needham Market which would be suitable for all pedestrian users. It was felt that NR had an obligation to provide a suitable crossing.

BC, AW and Cllr Newman have a meeting with Network Rail planned for the 12th March. Public Rights of Way need to be protected in an appropriate manner. AW believed BC's action of writing a letter on behalf of SLAF has prompted this meeting.

SLAF is leading the country on severance issues and BC asked for a volunteer to attend the National Local Access Conference in Durham as Network Rail is on the agenda.

ACTION: Please advise SCC Officers if you are able to attend the National LAF Conference.

AWr explained closures affecting the Cambridge line have national cycle routes over them. AWr feels SLAF should challenge all proposals.

DB questioned whether there was any S106 monies, AWr confirmed there wasn't.

BC will raise the issue of Great Barton at the meeting on 12th March. AW stated St Edmundsbury planners are keen to see the FP and accessible structure on the existing alignment.

BC thanked AW for his support.

7. Storm / Flood Damage (LAF 14/04)

Annette Robinson, East Area Rights of Way Manager, gave a presentation of photographs to support the paper.

There was a discussion on who was responsible for the maintenance and repair of the flood walls and how funding could be achieved to help repair the damage to the PROW network. The worst hit areas are those which are crucial to the local economy in terms of tourism as well the health benefits of walking.

AW felt it would be beneficial to accelerate the Coastal Access scheme in this county as the scheme would allow for roll back and better protect our routes.

Members felt the forum should intervene.

ACTION: The forum to write to the coastal MPs Peter Aldous, Therese Coffey and Tim Yeo to seek help in obtaining funding for repair work. Letter to be copied to SCC cabinet member with a covering letter.

AE asked whether the path closures were on the website.

AR confirmed they were on the Suffolk Coasts and Heath's website and the SCC website, although the information on the SCC website was contained in a spreadsheet.

ACTION: DF to put closure information and a link to Suffolk Coast & Heath website on the home page of Discover Suffolk.

BC thanked AR for her presentation.

8. Regional LAF Chair and Vice Chair Meeting (LAF 14/05 and LAF14/06)

DB suggested a photo of the A11 underpass should be published.

ACTION: DF to send photo for the LAF newsletter.

9. Sizewell C (LAF14/07, LAF14/07 appendix 1 and LAF 14/07 appendix 2)

AW stressed that SLAF needed to input into and endorse the draft access principles.

RP knows the area well and believes it is a tremendous opportunity to improve off road access.

The economic value of access and health & wellbeing in this area is very high. It is therefore important that EDF know early on in the proceedings what the access priorities are.

The Forum felt this would be an amazing opportunity to create safe off road access, in particular the creation of a bridleway along the old railway track from Leiston to Aldeburgh.

DK suggested it was important to consult with the local communities and parish councils; SLAF members agreed.

Also need to ensure routes are accessible for people with disabilities.

ACTION: SLAF endorse the draft access principles.

10. CAP Consultation

AW advised that the result of the consultation was published. DEFRA had opted to transfer 12% (out of 15%) of funds from direct payments to rural development schemes as part of CAP reform.

MP noted the lack of reference to Access.

11. Budget 2014/15

AW reported the budget was likely to be reduced by £100,000 in 2014/15, for the department as a whole it was only 10% but the cut would be in the Definitive Map Team, which equates to 30% of their budget. The council needs to save £156m over four years.

12. Update / Correspondence

Mildenhall

DF reported the scheme was progressing well, within budget and on time. The finish date is still set for the end of February with an official launch in March. There has already been an increase in the use of the route, including people with pushchairs and using wheelchairs. There have been many favourable comments as people have seen progress made and the quality of work to date.

DK questioned how schemes got prioritised.

DF explained how the Dept of Transport set the criteria in conjunction with Sustrans and this was one of three schemes put forward (two of the three schemes in Suffolk were successful). The scheme had been on the books for several years and was supported by the local parishes and councillors.

BC congratulated DF in being successful in securing funding.

2014 Suffolk Walking Festival

DF advised this year's festival was between the 10th May and the 1st June and consists of 79 walks. The Festival brochures have gone to print and should be available late February.

The Discover Suffolk Challenge Walk will follow the Angles Way. The Suffolk Magazine and BBC Radio Suffolk media partners for the festival.

AE suggested that maybe funding could be raised from the Festival to help repair some of the flood damage. DF suggested a visitor payback scheme could be considered.

Ipswich Cord Update

AWr explained the Ipswich Cord project for the benefit of the new members. The design for an elevated walkway over the sluice is underway and works are due to commence in 2014. Cost are not yet known; Sustrans are hoping for funding from Network Rail to do the works.

13. Member's Topic/Any Other Business – nothing was raised.

14. Public Question Time – no members of the public attended.

15. Dates and Venues of Future Meetings

10 th April	Site visit to Walberswick, meeting in Walberswick.
17 th July	Venue TBC
16 th October	Venue TBC

End

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Suffolk Estuary Defence and Right of Way Trial
Meeting Date:	10 April 2014
Author/Contact:	David Falk
Venue:	Walberswick Village Hall

SLAF
Suffolk Local Access Forum

Councillor Graham Newman
Cabinet Member for Roads and Transport
Councillor Services

SLAF
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Ipswich
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IP1 9JW

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Email: slaf@suffolk.gov.uk
Web: <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>

Your Ref:
Our Ref: BC/JC
Date: 4 February 2014

Dear Councillor Newman,

Ref: The Costs to Suffolk County Council of Recovery after the East Coast Tidal Surge

I attach a letter from the Suffolk Local Access Forum to Suffolk's coastal MPs.

At its meeting on 30th January 2014, the forum heard a presentation on the damage to coastal and estuarine public rights of way caused by the storm surge in December. Members were of course aware of the damage, but were very concerned to see the full extent of it, and the impact it would have on public access and the local economy.

I hope the attached letter is of some help in securing funding to assist in repairs, and if I or the forum can be of further assistance please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Bryan Collen
Chairman, Suffolk Local Access Forum

cc
Alan Thorndyke, Head of Highway Network Management
Annette Robinson, East Area Rights of Way Manager
Nick Collinson, Natural Environment Manager
Matt Hullis, Head of Environment Strategy
Andrew Woodin, Rights of Way and Access Manager

SLAF
Suffolk Local Access Forum

Peter Aldous MP
 House of Commons
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Your Ref:
 Our Ref: BC/JC
 Date: 4 February 2014

Dear Mr Aldous

Ref: The Costs to Suffolk County Council of Recovery After the East Coast Tidal Surge

I am writing on behalf of the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF). Local access forums are statutorily prescribed bodies, introduced by s94 and s95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. Their main function is to advise their appointing authority as to the improvement of public access to land in that area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. Local access forums comprise appointed members who represent both users of local rights of way or access land and owners and occupiers of access land or land encompassing local rights of way. The forum also has members who represent the interests of people with disabilities and mobility restrictions.

The Government recognises and supports the important role of local access forums in contributing to improvements to greenspace, open access and connecting routes. These improvements contribute to local economic growth as well as the health and wellbeing of the population.

At its meeting on 30th January 2014, the forum heard a presentation on the damage to coastal and estuarine public rights of way caused by the storm surge in December. Members were of course aware of the damage, but were very concerned to see the full extent of it, in some cases the complete loss of sections of sea defence, and expressed a strong view that public access should be restored wherever possible. All of the damage in Suffolk lies within the Coast and Heaths AONB and the ability to walk along the coast and estuaries is one of the principle attractions to visitors and tourists, and thus of high economic value to the area.

I realise you appreciate this anyway, and my purpose in writing is to seek your intervention with Brandon Lewis MP, in his capacity as the Flood Recovery Minister. The Leader of Suffolk County Council, Mark Bee, met recently with Mr Lewis to discuss coastal damage and associated costs, and received a sympathetic hearing. Your assistance in encouraging a financial contribution from the Government to Suffolk County Council to enable repairs to take place before the start of the main tourist season would be very welcome.

Providing independent advice on access to the countryside in Suffolk

At its meeting, the forum also discussed the longer term future of coastal access and the maintenance of defences. Clearly this is a complex and sensitive subject which will take time to resolve, but in the short term it is important local communities and businesses do not suffer further from a drop in tourist and visitor numbers.

I do hope you will be able to help.

Yours sincerely

Bryan Collen
Chairman, Suffolk Local Access Forum

SLAF
Suffolk Local Access Forum

Dr Therese Coffey MP
 House of Commons
 London
 SW1A 0AA

SLAF
 PO Box 872
 Ipswich
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Tel: 01473 264759
 Fax: 01473 216877
 Email: slaf@suffolk.gov.uk
 Web: <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>

Your Ref:
 Our Ref: BC/JC
 Date: 4 February 2014

Dear Dr Coffey

Ref: The Costs to Suffolk County Council of Recovery After the East Coast Tidal Surge

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I do hope you will be able to help.

Yours sincerely

Bryan Collen
Chairman, Suffolk Local Access Forum

SLAF
Suffolk Local Access Forum

Tim Yeo MP
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 Email: slaf@suffolk.gov.uk
 Web: <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>

Your Ref:
 Our Ref: BC/JC
 Date: 4 February 2014

Dear Mr Yeo

Ref: The Costs to Suffolk County Council of Recovery After the East Coast Tidal Surge

I am writing on behalf of the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF). Local access forums are statutorily prescribed bodies, introduced by s94 and s95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. Their main function is to advise their appointing authority as to the improvement of public access to land in that area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. Local access forums comprise appointed members who represent both users of local rights of way or access land and owners and occupiers of access land or land encompassing local rights of way. The forum also has members who represent the interests of people with disabilities and mobility restrictions.

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I do hope you will be able to help.

Yours sincerely

Bryan Collen
Chairman, Suffolk Local Access Forum



DR THERESE COFFEY MP

Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

020 7219 7164 therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk

Mr Bryan Collen
Suffolk Local Access Forum
PO Box 872
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Suffolk IP1 9JW

07 February 2014

Dear Mr Collen,

Thank you for contacting me regarding the costs from the tidal surge.

I have written to the Department for Communities and Local Government asking them to address your concerns. As soon as I receive a reply I will write to you again.

Yours sincerely,

www.theresecoffeymp.com www.twitter.com/theresecoffey

SLAF
Suffolk Local Access Forum

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Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Date: 5 March 2014

Dear Dr Coffey

Re: East Coast Tidal Surge

Thank you for your letter dated 7 February 2014. The Suffolk Local Access Forum look forward to hearing from you again.

Yours sincerely



 Bryan Collen
Chairman, Suffolk Local Access Forum

Providing independent advice on access to the countryside in Suffolk

END

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	Network Rail
Meeting Date:	10 April 2014
Author/Contact:	Andrew Woodin
Venue:	Walberswick Village Hall

Introduction

One of the local access forum's priorities is to address the severance of public rights of way by trunk roads and railway lines. Progress on railway crossings has been reported previously to the forum, including at two of the three sites below, and this paper provides an update.

Needham Market



Needham Market Gipsy Lane and FP6

At its meeting in January, it was reported that the chairman would be meeting with Network Rail and Cllr Newman to lobby for an accessible structure to replace the two public footpath level crossings.

This meeting took place on 17th February. Present were Bryan Collen, the chairman of the Suffolk Local Access Forum, Gavin Armstrong (Director, Route Asset Management), Rob Bolton (Commercial Scheme Sponsor) from NR and Councillor Graham Newman, Alan Thorndyke and Andrew Woodin from SCC. At the meeting, Mr Armstrong emphasised that NR fully intended to install a steps only footbridge at Gipsy Lane, with line possessions booked for August, and reiterated this decision was driven by site and not financial constraints.

The forum's chair made it clear SLAF are very opposed to a steps only footbridge replacing the two level crossings and from his site visit earlier that day believed local residents are opposed too. A steps only footbridge would be very detrimental to local residents' quality of life. The chair asked why is it not possible to construct a

tunnel, and noted SLAF are prepared to object to orders if necessary. Cllr Newman and officers voiced the county council's concerns and opposition to a steps only replacement to the level crossings. Alan Thorndyke and Cllr Newman asked NR if an equalities impact assessment had been undertaken for a steps only footbridge and stressed the importance of this happening, Mr Bolton indicated it had not. The focus of the meeting was whether an underpass could be provided at FP6, which was the most suitable location as the railway there is on an embankment.

The outcome of the meeting was that SCC's consultants would review the engineering detail behind NR's "GRIP 3" engineering report as to why an underpass at FP6 has been ruled out, and engage with the landowners whether they will accommodate the necessary works, in the interests of retaining access for the town. The meeting would then reconvene in 4 weeks time for a final decision.

Following the meeting, SCC's engineers advised it is feasible to install a subway at FP6 and at Gipsy Lane, although the latter location would be more challenging to engineer and more disruptive to the railway.

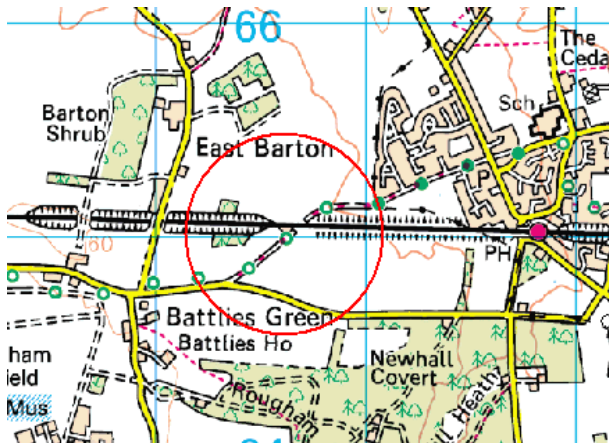
What has become very clear is the local community's preference for an accessible crossing at Gipsy Lane rather than at FP6. This has been expressed through emails and a local campaign.

The meeting between the county council, SLAF and NR reconvened on 27th March 2014, when Cllrs Graham Newman and Mary Evans, with Steve Kerr, Andrew Woodin and Alan Thorndyke, met with Bryan Collen, SLAF chairman, and Steve Day, Liability Negotiations Adviser, Network Rail. At the meeting, the county council and Mr Collen stressed again the importance of the local community being able to safely and accessibly cross the railway line to enjoy the local countryside and be able to walk to Creeting parish. There is strong local feeling, including a very recent written objection to a stepped bridge from Creeting St Mary parish council, and media coverage, including the concerns of the Suffolk Coalition of Disabled People, as well as a local campaign for an underpass at Gipsy Lane. It is very clear the local community's preference is for an accessible crossing at Gipsy Lane rather than at FP6, and the county council's own engineers are of the view that an underpass there is, whilst not without challenges, feasible.

The outcome of the meeting was that Mr Day agreed NR would reconsider the underpass option at Gipsy Lane. Rob Bolton, NR Commercial Scheme Sponsor, has subsequently been in contact with the county council and requested information on dimensions and other details it would like to see included in a feasibility study into a Gipsy Lane underpass.

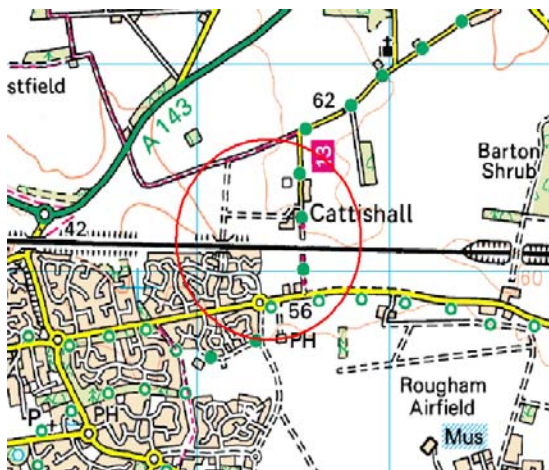
This positive news must be caveated that both Messrs Day and Bolton have stated they are awaiting approval from their director on the feasibility study, at the time of writing this has not been received.

Great Barton BR 12



NR propose to replace the level crossing between Bury St Edmunds and Thurston with a ramped and stepped bridge. A planning application was submitted in November 2013 but subsequently withdrawn due to adverse comments from Sustrans and a local resident. The county council is concerned NR's proposed gradients of 1 in 12 are steep in a location close to Bury and Thurston, with its secondary school, and on a national cycle route. NR met with SCC in March to discuss its concerns and explain why it is so constrained on the gradient of the ramps. At the time of writing the county council is considering whether it will object to 1 in 12 ramps if these are included in the revised planning application.

Cattishall



So far, this crossing had not been a high priority for NR, although it is a crossing they would like to close. The surrounding area, on the edge of Moreton Hall, is in St Edmundsbury's Vision 31 master plan as an area of continued housing and industrial expansion, and SCC and St Eds BC have been working together to ensure an accessible, on line structure is provided within the development brief to ensure the increasing numbers of users continue to have a convenient route to and from the Mount Road cycle path, whether travelling east or west, or south to the proposed future development on that side of the road.

NR's preference is to close the level crossing and divert users to an existing underpass c.420m to the west. Neither SCC nor SEBC consider the resultant dog leg diversion to be convenient or likely to encourage sustainable travel or healthier lifestyles.

Sadly, on 24th March, at about 9.00am, a cyclist using the level crossing was struck by a west bound train and died at the scene. A coroner's report is being prepared.

A Network Rail spokesperson said: "Network Rail remains committed to reducing level crossing risk as much as possible and we have invested £131m to upgrade or close more than 700 level crossings nationwide since 2010, with a further 500 planned in the next five years. As part of this, we continue to examine and assess level crossings in the Anglia route".

The county council will continue to work with Network Rail and SEBC on this crossing to ensure the right balance is reached between line safety and public access.

END

AW/SCC
April 2014

Suffolk Local Access Forum	
Title:	National LAF Report
Meeting Date:	10 April 2014
Author/Contact:	David Falk
Venue:	Walberswick Village Hall

National LAF Annual Report - April 2012 to March 2013

Foreword by Natural England

I am delighted to introduce Natural England's annual report to Defra on the work that Local Access Forums achieved during the year ending 31st March 2013. We believe it presents an excellent illustration of how LAFs are influencing local access issues as well as giving a realistic assessment of the challenges they are facing.

In February 2013 we hosted the National LAF Conference, with the theme 'Sharing Good Practice – Sharing Solutions'. This report echoes that theme as we share examples of how the body of volunteers who comprise the LAFs are working at a local level to deliver improved access opportunities for the communities they serve.

LAFs have been active in a range of areas: their direct input to plans and strategies has delivered material gains for access; they have facilitated joint working and partnership approaches; they produce information and guidance that both enables people to access the countryside and developers to improve the infrastructure they provide; and they promote volunteering and harness this energy to increase public benefit.

This report will be passed on to the Minister so that he is aware of the good work that LAFs do. It will also be used as a wider promotional tool, hopefully to inspire the LAF members across England to continue and expand their good work, but also to encourage others to recognise the valuable role that LAFs can play at a local level to engage with and enhance a range of agendas, from health to economic development.

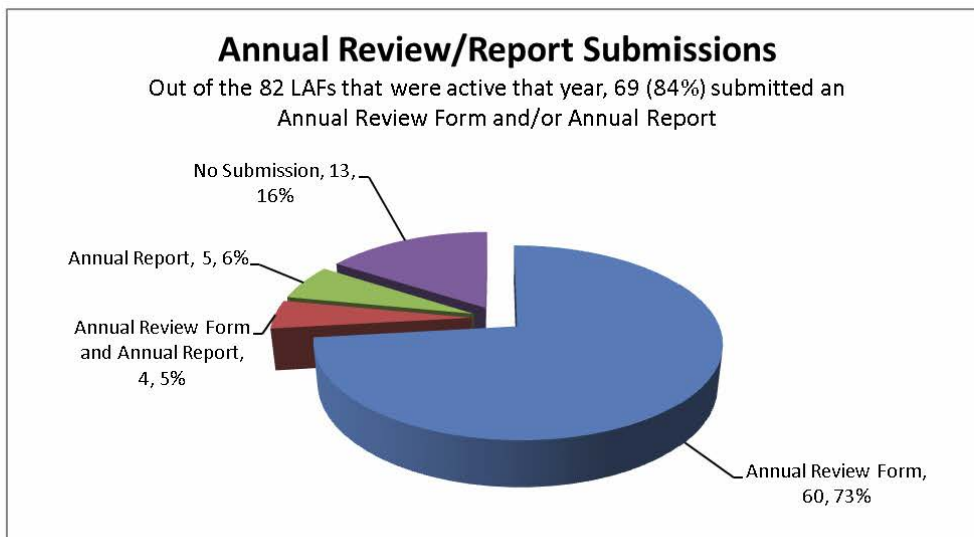
Liz Newton
Natural England Director, Access and Engagement
January 2014

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 2012 to March 2013. 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.

LAFs were asked to submit an annual report to Natural England, by the 31st October. The LAF Regional Coordinators produced summary reports for their region which have also been used to inform this report.

The final submission results are as follows:



2. LAF achievements

Examples of LAF activities in their annual reports are wide-ranging. The following is a selection of achievements that have helped to secure access benefits for local communities:

Bracknell Forest LAF – The LAF helped organise a walking and outdoor festival to celebrate and promote the borough's public rights of way. Activities included walking and cycling to suit all abilities. There was a good turn out and positive feedback with many participants expressing an interest in pursuing more outdoor activities and volunteering. Smaller sessions may be held in future, as it would be difficult to hold a similar big event on a regular basis.

Central Bedfordshire and Luton LAF – The LAF were involved in the production of the Central Bedfordshire Outdoor Access Improvement Plan 2013 - 31 and also the significant reduction in the number of stiles within the local rights of way network.

Cheshire/Cheshire East LAF – The LAF submitted a formal response to the Highways Agency's local Environmental Improvement Scheme consultation. Some of the LAF's suggestions have been taken on board, most notably, the recommendation that part of a de-trunked road be made into a traffic-free route for non-motorised users.

County Durham LAF - Following a request from the LAF, Durham County Council agreed to dedicate two pieces of land as open access.

Cumbria LAF – The LAF provided advice to Natural England on the first and second stretches of the Coastal Trail in the Northwest.

Devon Countryside Access Forum (CAF) – The CAF produced a guidance note for liaison with landowners/land managers when new routes are proposed. They continued to encourage the county to adopt a policy of multi-user routes and provided a major response to the Defra consultation on Improvements to the Legal and Policy Framework for Public Rights of Way. The CAF have been involved in pre-draft discussions on the County Cycling Strategy and, with Devon Wildlife Trust, on a significant new access site following acquisition of a former ball clay quarry.

Essex LAF – The LAF facilitated a series of meetings between the access authority and a local planning authority to try to resolve two long-term obstruction cases and to encourage more joined up working in the future.

Hertfordshire LAF – The LAF lobbied Lafarge Tarmac to improve access to a new country park at Panshanger, Hertford and the first 3 mile route is now open. They engaged with the Local Nature Partnership to ensure access issues are included on

their agenda and also with the local authority's 'Active Travel Strategy' consultation, keeping the needs of non-motorised users firmly on the agenda.

Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire Joint LAF (JLAF) - The Avon Ramblers' Voluntary Wardens scheme was successfully established and work parties installed gates and cleared vegetation on the public rights of way network. A 'Walkers are Welcome' working group was established and parish councils, for areas which could potentially be included in the scheme, were contacted to gauge their interest.

The JLAF sought to positively influence the behaviour of the minority of dog walkers who cause problems on the network by producing and distributing advice about cleaning up after dogs and keeping dogs under control. They also sought to identify potential improvements to the bridleway network and prioritise missing links in the network which could improve facilities for horse riders.

Leicester City LAF - The Forum responded with enthusiasm to the works being undertaken within the city centre and issued advice on some of the proposals. Interest in the public realm and improvements for pedestrians and cyclists using the city centre is a departure from previous issues considered by the LAF.

Leicestershire LAF - The LAF lead a proposed Unrecorded and Lost Ways project which forms part of a Landscape Partnership bid to the HLF. The Forum established an Unrecorded Ways sub-group to co-ordinate this and to give a specific focus to its activities in this field. The LAF sees this as the first step to enable the research to move forward throughout the rest of the County.

The LAF continued to be involved in discussions with the County Council about using volunteers. This included unrecorded rights of way as noted above, and additional support for promoting and using paths. The Forum also raised the possibility of closer work with the few larger areas of open access land in the county.

The LAF alerted parishes and user groups to the permissive access provided by EU Higher Level Stewardship funding. Members of the LAF continued to encourage Parish Councils to discuss with farmers the possibility of this access being retained, particularly in cases where the sites deliver real public benefits, once the funding ends.

Manchester, Salford & Trafford Joint LAF – The LAF worked with the city council on changes to management of an area which has ensured better and safer access (tackling fear of crime) and protection of wildlife.

New Forest LAF – The LAF are represented on the key decision making committees convened by the National Park Authority to promote recreation and implement the Recreation Management Strategy. They were actively involved in the design of a programme for the visit to the New Forest of the Independent Panel on

Forestry. They also took part in hosting the visit, and in particular were able to demonstrate the involvement of the community in the protection, conservation and enjoyment of the Forest. They joined with New Forest Access for All group in making representations to New Milton Town Council on recommending improvements to access to a recreation ground, with particular emphasis on mobility scooter access.

The LAF engaged with the Board of Management for the £16m New Forest EU Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and achieved greater transparency through an Annual Report and public meeting. They also succeeded in re-establishing a direct input into the county Common Agricultural Policy management programme.

Nottingham City LAF – The LAF were involved in pre-planning application discussions to advise on how the design and layout of public paths can complement development. All members were given a shared responsibility and involvement. The forum developed a series of self-guided walks across Nottingham which involved an on-line leaflet.

Rotherham LAF – The LAF was successful in carrying out a range of access improvement works including new and replacement ROW furniture, vegetation clearing, surface improvements and signposting. The LAF also provided advice and support on a number of high profile developments, including Connect 2 schemes, and continued dialogue to enhance access at housing developments and canal link improvements.

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead LAF – The LAF's recommendation to the Council to use volunteer labour for path works has resulted in over 900 volunteer working hours since 2011. The LAF monitored the use of volunteers for vegetation clearance and path repair work on the public rights of way network, receiving regular reports at each meeting. Discussion with the local authorities has led to a recommendation for the borough council to retain routine maintenance responsibilities.

The LAF also made direct improvements to the public rights of way network in several ways including: setting up a working group to develop a proposal for a 'Multi-user route' which opened in May 2013 for a 1 year trial period; creating a "Millennium walk" missing link using the forum's Permitted Path Pack; recommending improvement to bridleway links in the Borough, including Horse Margins; advising on a new Easy Going Route leaflet, on new guidance notes for dog walkers and on a new Public Rights of Way information booklet.

Sandwell LAF – The LAF organised field meetings with adjacent LAFs, initiated a successful marathon and mobilised volunteer support from the local Ramblers Group. They used the services of a local Community Payback team to clean up several footpaths and open spaces blighted by litter and rubbish. Birmingham Rights of Way Department were persuaded to announce they intend to make a modification order to record a long time obstructed path leading into Sandwell Valley, on the

Definitive Map as a Restricted Byway. This action was directly as a result of the field meeting held jointly with Birmingham LAF in March 2013.

Shropshire LAF - The LAF has established a closer working relationship with Public Health who are now part of Shropshire Council. This was demonstrated at the Annual LAF Conference, where the LAF secretary and Public Health lead for physical activity ran a workshop on health and LAF involvement.

South Downs LAF - The LAF was appointed as a brand new LAF for the new National Park. One of the big jobs for the National Park Authority and all its partners and stakeholders was to produce a Partnership Management Plan which has recently been published and the LAF were an important consultee in formulating this. LAF members were invited to special engagement events and many of them were chosen to sit on the South Downs Partnership which oversaw the development of the plan.

Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Wolverhampton Joint LAF - The JLAF has commented on HS2's proposed high speed rail link and have been instrumental in ensuring that public access is maintained. Proposals have been incorporated by HS2. The LAF Bridleways Working Group has made recommendations on how bridleway provision in north Staffordshire could be enhanced.

The LAF supported Stoke-on-Trent City Council's successful bid to National Heritage Lottery for the Green Door Project which aims to encourage people to make more use of the green spaces in the city to improve physical and mental wellbeing and reduce isolation. The LAF sit on the Project Management Group to oversee the initiative. The LAF also supported a successful application for Paths for Communities funding for a project in the Forest of Mercia.

Stockport LAF – The LAF contributed to the completion of a key link in a Sustrans sponsored project as part of the National Cycle Network funded from a £250,000 Lottery grant. The new route has dramatically improved community links within Stockport, giving local people the chance to make more of their journeys without having to rely on a car.

Tees Valley Joint LAF – The JLAF played an active part in the establishment of the England Coastal Path and worked on the Heritage Lottery Fund programmes 'Limestone Landscapes' and 'River Tees Re-Discovered'. Limestone Landscapes will see improvements to the footpath network and complimentary to this the LAF has supported a Paths for Communities bid by Elwick Parish Council to Natural England.

The JLAF also focussed on potentially hazardous crossing points where footpaths cross the rail network and it is encouraging to see that Network Rail has addressed some of these issues.

Wakefield LAF - LAF members had two half day sessions waymarking paths, identifying where signs were needed and looking at any other path issues. The LAF supported the Paths for Communities project put forward by the Wakefield Cycle Forum and the proposal suggested by West Bretton Parish Council. It also supported a local cycle route project. The LAF were keen to encourage members of the public to meetings and Local Public Paths was added as a standard agenda item to allow members of the public to raise issues they would like to discuss with the LAF.

Walsall LAF – The LAF initiated an arrangement with the Ramblers Association to undertake voluntary maintenance such as path clearance and installation/ repair of infrastructure and signs/ waymakers.

Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull LAF – The JLAF provided consistent and clear advice to the authorities in their dealings with the HS2 company and the authorities are working together to address the under-representation on cycling matters.

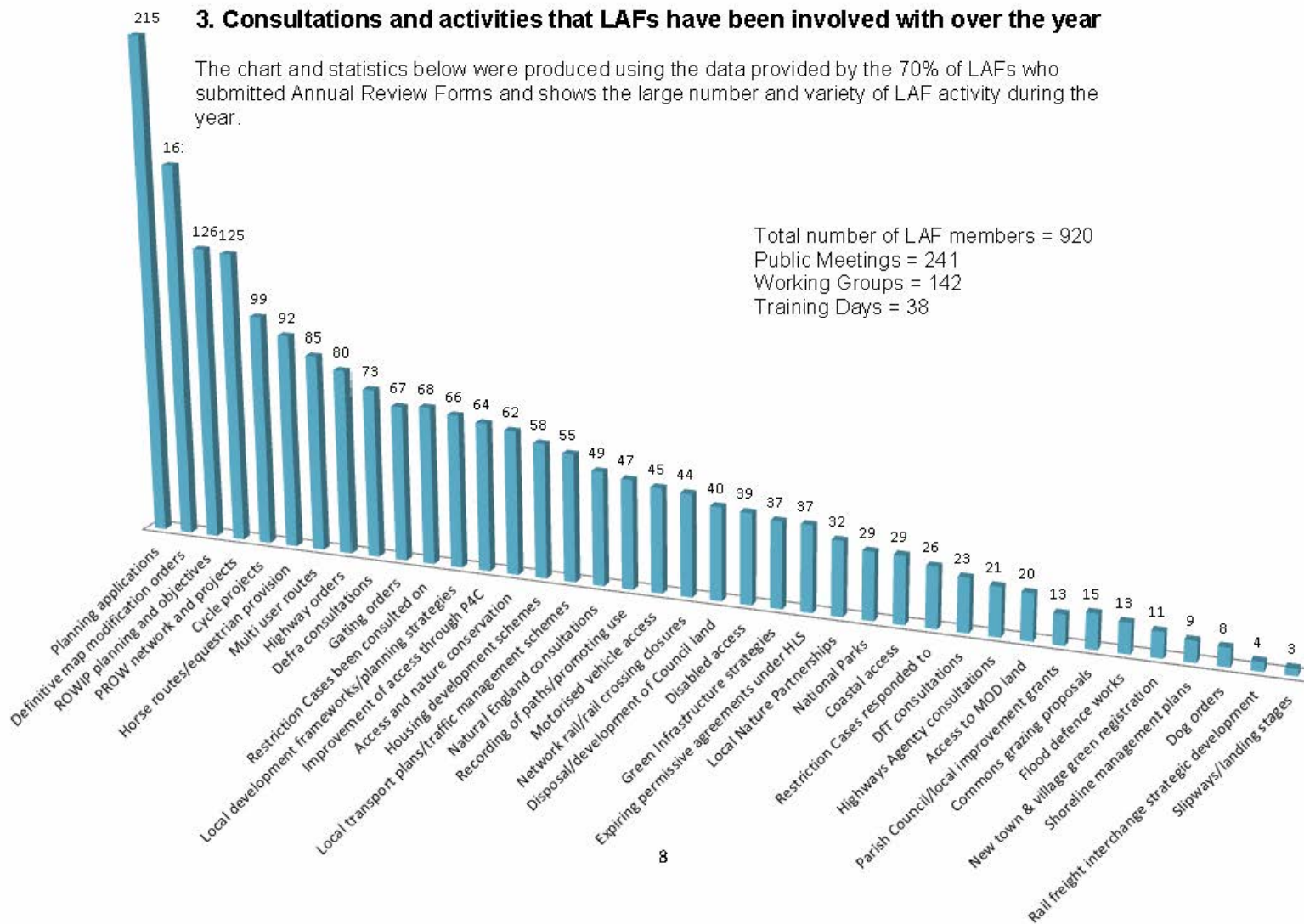
Wiltshire CAF – The CAF provided support for practical, 'grassroots' access improvement through a scheme operated in conjunction with Wiltshire Council which provided match funding for a range of projects brought forward by parish councils. Through the scheme CAF representatives were able to offer advice on how individual projects might be improved and developed to add further value to the network. This channel of communication with parish councils has identified other sources of community funding to invest in the RoW network. One particular initiative, to replace stiles with gates on a substantial scale throughout a district, proved especially successful in attracting financial backing from alternative community based funding streams.

They also established closer working with the North Wessex Downs AONB in conjunction with West Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire LAFs. The partnership has identified the need to collaborate with and influence the various Local Natura Partnership's in the region to address a common concern that access to the countryside does not figure sufficiently in their priorities. LNPs are also seen as the critical gateway for influencing LEP's and promoting the economic potential of access to the countryside. The AONB/LAF consortium will also seek to influence the respective destination management organisations to advocate the economic benefits of access to the countryside and its relationship with tourism development.

3. Consultations and activities that LAFs have been involved with over the year

The chart and statistics below were produced using the data provided by the 70% of LAFs who submitted Annual Review Forms and shows the large number and variety of LAF activity during the year.

Total number of LAF members = 920
 Public Meetings = 241
 Working Groups = 142
 Training Days = 38

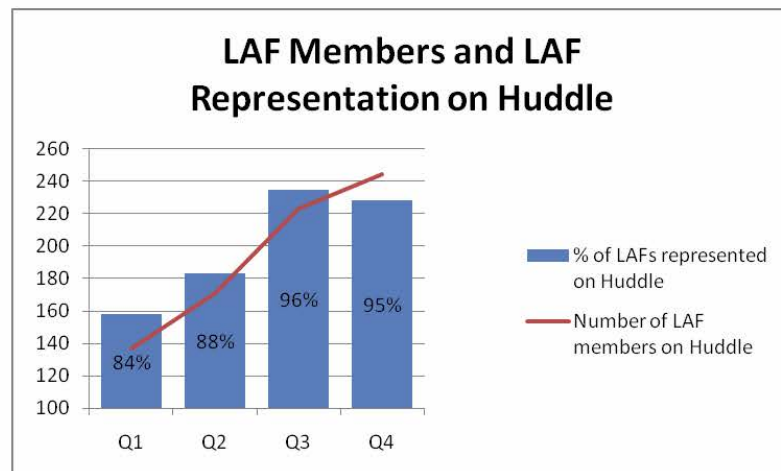


4. LAF communications and events

4.1 Huddle: internet based network to share information

The LAF workspace on Huddle was set up to help LAFs to work together and share good practice, and to facilitate communication with Natural England and Defra.

Throughout the year the number of LAF members using Huddle increased to 244 with 95% of LAFs represented.



The following feedback from LAF Chairs and Secretaries regarding how easy they found Huddle to use and how frequently they used it was taken from the annual LAF survey.

How often do you use Huddle?			
		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Daily	0.00%	0
2	Weekly	28.79%	19
3	Monthly	34.85%	23
4	Other, please specify:	36.36%	24
		answered	66
		skipped	12
Answers for: Other, please specify:		24 answers	

How would you rate Huddle for ease of use?			
1	Very good		11.86% 7
2	Good		22.03% 13
3	Satisfactory		45.76% 27
4	Poor		16.95% 10
5	Very poor		3.39% 2
			answered 59
			skipped 19

How do you feedback information from Huddle to your LAF?			
1	Email		39.34% 24
2	At meetings		62.30% 38
3	Don't feedback		21.31% 13
4	Other, please specify:		18.03% 11
			answered 61
			skipped 17
Answers for: Other, please specify:			<i>11 answers</i>

Do you feel confident to join in discussions or post comments?			
1	Yes		67.24% 39
2	No		32.76% 19
			answered 58
			skipped 20

Do you feel confident to upload files or create / update Whiteboards?			
1	Yes		50.00% 30
2	No		50.00% 30
			answered 60
			skipped 18

The results of the survey give us confidence that Huddle is being used by LAFs and does indeed offer an important mechanism for enabling feedback and dialogue. More work needs to be done to improve the confidence of users to make best use of the facility.

4.2 LAF conference

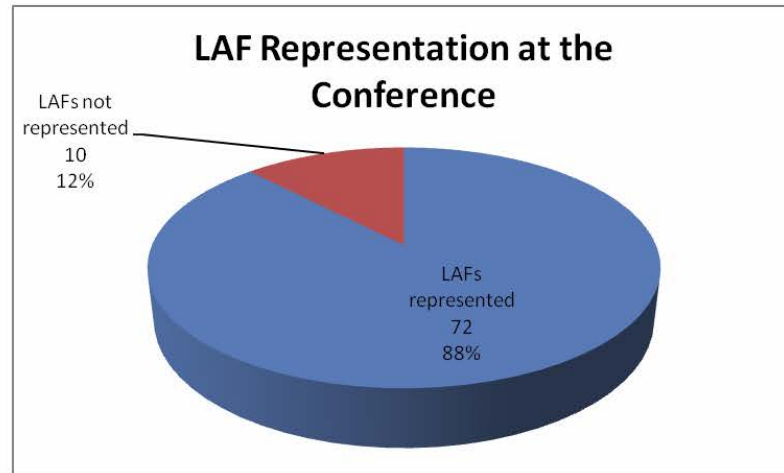
In February 2013, a national LAF conference was organised and hosted by Natural England in Sheffield with speakers from Defra/Natural England/Hampshire LAF and workshops led mainly by LAF members. The theme of the conference was 'Sharing good practice: sharing solutions'. The main presentations were

- Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment – headlines from Natural England's annual survey – Natural England
- Providing Access to Hampshire's Heritage – Hampshire LAF
- Rights of Way Improvement Plans of the future – Defra

The workshops were on the following themes:

- Facilitating Disabled Access
- Green Infrastructure
- Huddle
- Engage with Health Agenda
- Multi-User Routes
- Local Nature Partnerships
- Paths for Communities Clinic
- Impacts of Cuts
- Planning Issues
- Open Access Clinic
- Working with Volunteers
- Urban LAFs

Of the 82 LAFs, 72 (88%) were represented at the conference.



Conference feedback forms (blanks were omitted from the data) revealed:

- Did the content of the day meet your objectives? = 100% Yes
- Conference organisation / logistics satisfaction:
Very satisfied 71%, Satisfied 26%, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 3%






Materials from the conference, including workshop notes and feedback from delegates, are available to download from the LAF Huddle Workspace and the Natural England website.






5. LAF survey



Between 8th and 28th March 2013 an online survey of LAF Chairs and Secretaries was conducted. A total of 78 responses were received (77 online, 1 emailed).



Questions covered a range of subjects for example:



Do you know who your LAF local contact is in Natural England?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		88.41%	61
2	No		11.59%	8
			answered	69
			skipped	9

How would you rate the level of support from your LAF local contact?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very good		16.42%	11
2	Good		34.33%	23
3	Satisfactory		31.34%	21
4	Poor		13.43%	9
5	Very poor		4.48%	3
			answered	67
			skipped	11

How would you rate the level of support from Natural England nationally?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very good		7.25%	5
2	Good		28.99%	20
3	Satisfactory		49.28%	34
4	Poor		13.04%	9
5	Very poor		1.45%	1
			answered	69
			skipped	9

Are you aware of the Defra guidance issued by the Secretary of State in 2007?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		85.51%	59
2	No		14.49%	10
			answered	69
			skipped	9

Do you use it?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		70.59%	48
2	No		29.41%	20
			answered	68
			skipped	10

Does it need to be revised?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes (provide details below)		45.61%	26
2	No		54.39%	31
			answered	62
			skipped	16
Answers for: If you answered 'Yes', how should it be revised?			32 answers	

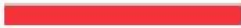


Do you feel that you are fairly treated by Natural England?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		92.19%	59
2	No		7.81%	5
			answered	64
			skipped	14

Results roundup and feedback was produced and circulated to the LAFs via Huddle in April 2013 and suggestions and ideas recorded in the survey fed into the LAF Engagement Plan produced for the year 2013-14.

6. LAF Regional Coordinators

As with previous years, eight LAF Regional Coordinators were contracted by Natural England to help support the LAFs during the year. The Regional Coordinators arranged 18 regional meetings or conferences in 2012/13.

The following feedback from LAF Chairs and Secretaries on how they rated the level of support provided by the Regional Coordinators has been taken from the LAF survey.

How would you rate the level of support from your LAF regional coordinator?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Very good		52.24%	35
2	Good		34.33%	23
3	Satisfactory		13.43%	9
4	Poor		0.00%	0
5	Very poor		0.00%	0
			answered	67
			skipped	11

7. Issues and challenges identified by LAFs

The Annual Review Form provided to LAFs for their annual reporting included sections for LAFs to list some of the issues they have faced over the year along with their suggestions and ideas that could possibly help with these in the future.

The challenges faced included:

- problems in recruiting and retaining sufficient members and members that represent a diverse range of interests;
- difficulties in responding to planning consultations due to lack of notification and insufficient time for LAFs to respond;
- lack of understanding and awareness of the role of LAFs;
- reduced local authority resources leading to fewer meetings and reduced administrative support;
- reduced budgets for the local authority to undertake rights of way duties and inability to act on advice provided by LAFs;
- lack of clarity about terms of reference and meeting protocol.

Opportunities and suggestions included:

- Making LAFs formal consultees with planning authorities rather than receiving information via the Rights of Way section;
- Acknowledging the changing role of LAFs to become conduits and catalysts for other groups and initiatives eg Local Nature Partnerships, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Boards, and funding bodies;
- Continuation of, or alternative to, the Paths for Communities Funding stream would help LAFs feel they can contribute more positively on the ground to access improvements and the implementation of aspirations in ROWIPs, alongside their advisory and strategic role.

Natural England and Defra are responding to these issues where possible, for example by introducing a LAF newsletter to celebrate the successes and raise the profile of LAFs with a wider group of bodies, and through arranging LAF run workshops on recruiting members to LAFs at the 2014 LAF conferences. Natural England is also supporting LAFs to share good practice through Huddle and at regular meetings and events.

8. Appointing authority feedback

Despite the many issues and challenges faced by the LAFs over the year, particularly regarding frustration through diminishing resources, many of the LAF appointing authorities had a number of positive comments to make about their work including:

- Gratitude for the commitment, dedication, breadth of experience and knowledge of the members;
- The valuable autonomy, independence and honesty of the LAFs and how they're not afraid to challenge authority;
- How many LAFs are well led and have a strong working relationship with local authority officers;
- Recognition of the significant amount of volunteer time given by their members.

Suffolk Local Access Forum

Title: Letter from Dan Rogerson MP, DEFRA

Meeting Date: 10 April 2014

Author/Contact: Andrew Woodin

Venue: Walberswick Village Hall



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April 2014

Local Access Forum Chairs

From Dan Rogerson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Water, Forestry, Rural Affairs and Resource Management

I would like to thank you for your work and achievements during the period of April 2012 to March 2013 in providing a local level body of expertise on public access and outdoor recreation issues.

The national annual report, compiled by Natural England, highlights the considerable range of achievements across the country by LAFs, and includes advice on coastal trails, managing dogs, working to ensure safer access, the protection of wildlife, and improvements for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

The report showcases an increased level of achievements since the previous report, and I particularly welcome the examples of partnership working across the sectors. I look to you to continue your involvement with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs), Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

I also welcome the increase in your number reporting an initiation or contribution towards the engagement of volunteers to undertake path maintenance and improvement work; and the number of references to LAFs being directly involved in the delivery of an improved network, whether by contributing advice to a Paths for Communities project or practical initiatives to waymark routes or remove stiles.

I encourage you and your members to continue your work advising local highway authorities on the revision of their Rights of Way Improvement Plans. I am particularly keen that you ensure that revised ROWIPs cover access to woodland, as well as other land types, and consider how to provide improved provision for horse-riders.

I look forward to the continued achievements of LAFs in the future.

DAN ROGERSON MP



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE