

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Francesca Clarke</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Highfield Road, Ipswich</b>

		Paper Number
1. 15.00	<b>Welcome, apologies and housekeeping</b>	
2.	<b>Minutes of previous meeting</b>	LAF 14/19
3.	<b>Declaration of interest</b>	
4. 15.10	<b>Rights of Way Improvement Plan Presentation</b>	LAF 15/01 – FC
	<b>ROWIP 2006-2016 Objectives</b>	LAF 15/01 – Appendix 1
5.	<b>Network Rail – Public Rights of Way Level Crossings update</b>	LAF 15/02 – AW
6.	<b>A11 Official Opening on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014 SLAF letter to Mark Hardingham</b>	LAF 15/03 – AW LAF 15/03 – Appendix 1
7.	<b>LAF Regional Meeting at Cambridge December 2014</b>	LAF 15/04 – DB
8.	<b>Natural England Correspondence</b>	LAF 15/05 – AW
	<b>East of England Local Access Forums Chairs and Vice-Chairs’ Regional Meeting Standard Access and Engagement paragraphs for response to draft strategies National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014</b>	LAF 15/05 – Appendix 1 LAF 15/05 – Appendix 2 LAF 15/05 – Appendix 3
9.	<b>Public Question Time</b>	
10. 17.00	<b>Date and Venue of Future Meetings</b>	

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Minutes of meeting held in Victory Cricket Pavilion, Bury St Edmunds on 16 October 2014</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Jill Christley</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Hadleigh Road, Ipswich</b>

### 1. Welcome, apologies and housekeeping

Present: David Barker (Vice Chair) (DB), Bryan Collen (Chair) (BC), Annette Ellis (AE), Jane Hatton (JH), Gordon Merfield (GM), Cllr Jane Storey (JS), Mike Taylor (MT), John Wayman (JW), Roland Wilson (RW), Anthony Wright (AWR).

SCC Officers Present: Jill Christley (minutes), Francesca Clarke (FC), Andrew Woodin (AW).

Apologies: Melinda Appleby (MA), Barry Hall (BH), Margaret Hancock (MA), Cllr Diana Kearsley (DK), Alan Moore (AM), Monica Pipe (MP).

Members of the public: Gordon Crosby and Merton Holden were welcomed to the meeting.

Francesca Clarke, a graduate trainee on placement in the SCC, Rights of Way and Access Team introduced herself, and was also welcomed to the meeting. One of her objectives is to assist in developing a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

### 2. Minutes of previous meeting (LAF14/19)

Amendment to minutes – item 5, paragraph 4 – While BR 19 is closed EDF will be providing an alternative bridleway.

Following this amendment the minutes to the previous meeting were confirmed to be an accurate record.

All actions had been completed.

#### **Matters arising**

Item 5 AW thanked members for completing the Sizewell questionnaire and for their comments and suggestions.

Item 6 A trial will take place in order to find the most resilient surface finish for paths on sea defences prone to flooding. The path selected for the trial is in Martlesham, and will have two spill-ways, one with a concrete block surface; the other will be surfaced with normal hoggin.

### 3. Declaration of interest

AWR (Sustrans) expressed an interest in agenda items 4 and 6.

#### 4. Network Rail (NR) – level crossings in progress (LAF 14/20)

Cotton FP13 and FP15 There are two crossings at Cotton. SCC believes the crossings are little used, as there are safer crossings in the area. AW said that SCC would not object to closure of the crossing. Network Rail have very recently applied formally for the path's permanent closure.

SCC is working with NR wherever possible to achieve reasonable outcomes to proposals to close crossings. BC agreed with SCC's stance.

Gt Barton BR12 SCC had reluctantly agreed to a bridge with a 1:12 ramp, and will not be objecting to diversion of the BR from the level crossing to the bridge, nor will they object to the retrospective planning application. Work is already under way.

Gipsy Lane A good cross-section of the community had attended the public meeting on 7 August 2014, several addressed the meeting.

Gordon Crosby (GC) was invited to speak, he is a local resident, and had attended the meeting. He said that NR claimed to have carried out an assessment into the feasibility of providing a crossing with disabled access. However, he later established (via a freedom of information (FOI) enquiry), that this had not been done.

A local petition had received 1000 signatures. This had been sent to the senior executive of NR.

There will be a meeting between local MPs and NR on 17/10/14.

BR said that NR's argument had originally been that an underpass would be impossible due to an engineering problem, but was now claiming it was too expensive.

GC was also dissatisfied with a usage survey carried out by NR. Their findings did not tally with a survey carried out by local people which showed around 100 people used the crossing in 10 hours. GC had asked NR whether mobility impaired people had been counted, and was awaiting their response.

DB had emailed David Ruffley MP, Dr Dan Poulter MP and Ben Gummer MP. They are supportive of an underpass option.

GC pointed out that this crossing affects people in villages further afield, such as Creting St Mary and Needham Market.

AW confirmed that the question of costs, flooding and lighting and other matters had been discussed between SCC and NR engineers. NR have commissioned another feasibility study, AW will update SLAF at the next meeting.

**ACTION** AW – update SLAF at the next meeting.

AWR said that there are a lot of footpaths across level crossings, and feared that closure of these was likely to be a problem in the future. He asked AW whether any provisional policies were in place.

AW explained that where vehicular access across level crossings is stopped up the public right of way will be maintained as (at a minimum) a bridleway. This has been explained to NR.

#### 5. **SLAF Annual Report (LAF 14/21)**

BC had presented the annual report to Cabinet, where it had been well received. Cabinet appreciate the work done by SLAF and consider it to be good value for money, and would be receptive to claims for more funding in the future.

AW had received positive feedback especially in respect of the Gypsy Lane, Needham Market issue, and SLAF's involvement on this.

Councillor Spicer had suggested that SLAF present their annual report to borough and district councils. Councillor Clements (portfolio holder for Planning and Regulation) had offered to facilitate this at St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

Within the council there are initiatives for planning and health, public rights of way are relevant to this.

JS – The St Edmundsbury Borough Council vision for 2021 is looking at ways of improving cycle-ways and walk-ways with the view to helping people make their journeys without using cars.

*Gordon Crosby and Merton Holden left the meeting.*

#### 6. **General Progress Update Report (LAF 14/22)**

A11 opening Guy McGregor, who was instrumental in the A11 project, is to be invited to the opening of the A11. Members of SLAF will also be invited; BC, DB, AWr and JH (plus possibly her horse!) expressed an interest in attending.

**ACTION** AW to arrange for above members to be invited to A11 opening.

The date of the opening is to be announced.

AWr raised the issue that in 2011 the Highways Agency's agreed to create an off-road, shared-use route for all non-motorised users between Thetford and Elveden. AWR expressed concern that no work had started. The forum agreed to write to SCC asking for the current position.

**ACTION** AWr to draft letter for SLAF to send to SCC.

#### Coastal Access

The Government's new 2020 deadline for completion was noted.

#### Sizewell C

A copy of the 'SZC Public Rights of Way Visitor Surveys Report of August 2014 Surveys – Extract' was circulated and discussed, SLAF and SCC had commented on the survey questions. It noted that equestrians are not listed in the report. AW to investigate.

**ACTION** AW circulate report to members.

**ACTION** AW establish why equestrians are not listed on the report.

Usage on BR 19 was found to be surprisingly low, this was discussed. AW will analyse the report, and consider factors that may have resulted in low usage.

**ACTION** AW analyse report.

The survey will be repeated in November.

LAF Engagement Plan – June 2014 (LAF 14/22 Appendix 1)  
LAF 14/22 was discussed.

LAF Regional Chair Meeting (LAF 14/22 Appendix 2)

The date for the next meeting has been set: 4/12/14. DB and/or BC will attend.

**ACTION** BC and DB confirm attendance with JC.

'National Rail level crossings' was suggested as an agenda item for the meeting.

## 7. Suffolk Walking Strategy

SCC's Public Health team are developing a walking strategy. FC will be involved with this. The Rights of Way team will be working with Public Health to avoid duplication of effort with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

The initial Walking Strategy meeting resulted in a number of aims and desired outcomes: the 'Walking Strategy Meeting Feedback' was circulated to the meeting, and will form the basis of the Walking Strategy. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for 7/11/14.

Public Health has offered £30,000 of funding to be spent by the Rights of Way and Access Team and the Countryside Team on promoting walking in the Brecks.

AW warned that the task ahead would be difficult. The aim is to encourage those who need exercise for health, and are not in the habit of taking exercise. Although there are more walkers and cyclists today, the strategy will not be targeting those people.

The project will identify the need for walks in rural areas which are safe, easy and about 1 mile long. A pilot scheme will develop short, local walks with no stiles and a good surface. It is hoped that GPs will be able to prescribe these walks, and issue leaflets to compliment them. This has been done in Manchester with some success.

The forum discussed this, and considered how else walks could be promoted, such as through community groups eg. Women's Institute.

RW supported the initiative, and told the forum that several people had joined the Ramblers Association as a direct result of taking part in the Suffolk Walking Festival, and 'walking for health' walks. He felt it is important to continue with these, as they are having a positive effect.

AE attended the initial walking strategy meeting and felt it had been very positive.

## 8. SLAF working groups (LAF 14/23)

AW asked that work groups be formalised, so that progress could continue to be made between meetings.

Members committed to work on the following topics, as follows:

Topic	Membership
Network Rail	Bryan Collen, Roley Wilson
Sizewell C	<b>Margaret Hancock</b> , Anthony Wright, Roley Wilson
Forests and Woodlands	<b>Melinda Appleby, Alan Moore</b>
Open Access	<b>Barry Hall</b> , Gordon Merfield, Mike Taylor
ROWIP and Suffolk Walking Strategy	Annette Ellis, Roley Wilson, Jane Hatton
Coastal Erosion and Access	Bryan Collen, Annette Ellis, Roley Wilson, Barry Hall
Planning and Development	Jane Storey, Jane Hatton, Anthony Wright
Agri-Environment Access Schemes	David Barker, John Wayman

**ACTION** – AW to ask absent members whether they would like to be involved with these or any other areas of interest.

**ACTION** – JC circulate list of working groups.

## 9. Cavenham Heath National Nature Reserve (NNR) (LAF 14/24)

AW introduced LAF 14/24.

BC expressed concern that Open Access land is closed unnecessarily, and asked that the presence of sensitive species be established before any request to close is approved.

*GM left the meeting*

## 10. Public Question Time

There were no remaining members of the public.

## 11. Dates and Venues of Future Meetings

29 January 2015 Venue to be arranged (Ipswich area).

23 April 2015 Venue to be arranged

9 July 2015 Venue to be arranged (Brandon Country Park)

22 October 2015 Venue to be arranged

## 12. AOB

- BC acknowledged the work David Falk had done for the forum. It was agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to David.  
**ACTION** BC/DB write to David.
- AE will be taking over organisation of the Suffolk Walking Festival, which is in the early stages for 2015.
- The January meeting will include a presentation by SCC on publishing a new improvement plan for 2016, a presentation by EDF on the Sizewell C user surveys and a report from MT on A11 habitat mitigation.

END

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Rights of Way Improvement Plan</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Francesca Clarke</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich</b>

## Introduction

Suffolk County Council's current Rights of way Improvement Plan, dated 2006-2016, is currently being evaluated with a view to replace it with a new improvement plan. This paper summarises the existing ROWIP and suggests proposals for the replacement ROWIP.

<http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/assets/ROWIP/SCC-ROWIP.pdf>

## Rights of Way Improvement Plan, 2006-2016

The Countryside and Rights of way Act (2000) requires each Highway Authority to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan in order to identify changes that will, 'improve provision for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and those with mobility problems'. The current RoWIP is a ten year plan due to expire in 2016 and therefore it is necessary to renew the current plan.

The Statement of Action forms the basis of a long-term management strategy for the Rights of Way network. It is based on six objectives (Appendix 1) which are-

Objective A: Provide a better signed, maintained and accessible network.

Objective B: Provide and protect a more continuous network that provides requirements for all users

Objective C: Develop a safer network

Objective D: Increase community involvement in improving and managing the network

Objective E: Provide an up to date and publicly available digitised Definitive Map for the whole of Suffolk

Objective F: Improve promotion, understanding and use of the network.

## **New Rights of Way and Access Priorities**

### **A. Health Agenda**

The need to encourage people to exercise is an extremely high priority within the health agenda. A Walking Strategy is being drafted, with the aim of publishing by May 2015. The core vision of the strategy is for all Suffolk people to walk more often.

The Suffolk Cycling Strategy (2014) aims to increase the numbers of people cycling in Suffolk. It supports Suffolk's 'Creating Greenest County' ambitions as well as outlining the physical and mental health benefits of cycling.

<http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/suffolk.gov.uk/Environment%20and%20Transport/Cycling/20140619%20Cycling%20Strategy%20booklet.pdf>

Section Three of Suffolk's Nature Strategy (2014), focuses on health and well-being. It recognises that access to, and enjoyment of the countryside is important. Physical and mental well-being is known to be associated with an accessible and attractive natural environment.

<http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/suffolk.gov.uk/Environment%20and%20Transport/Environment/Suffolk%20Nature%20Strategy%20brochure.pdf>

The Public Rights of Way network and Open Access provides opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding to access the countryside and enjoy the outdoors. In urban areas, using the PRow network can be a viable alternative to using a car for short journeys to shops and local services, and can get people into the routine of taking regular exercise. The main health benefits of using the PRow network are –

- Opportunity to take part in physical exercise
- Contribution to maintaining good health and recovery from illness
- Reducing stress
- Social activity
- Reducing loneliness through social interaction
- Reduction in the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, anxiety and stress.

The new RoWIP has to encourage the use of rights of way to promote health and well-being as part of an active lifestyle. To do this it will be essential to engage with partners delivering health care to maximise opportunities for the use of the network to contribute to health and well-being.

### **B. Planning**

Due to the improving strength of the economy, plans for large scale developments in Suffolk are being submitted. These large (and smaller) developments provide opportunities for creating and developing existing rights of way. The rights of way network from proposed developments need to give people access to the surrounding countryside.

In the National Planning Policy Framework (2013), paragraph, 75, related to rights of way, states: “Planning policies should protect and enhance public rights of way and access. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.”

Rights of way can be enhanced and improved by development, with opportunities for new surfacing, a route to be utilised in new ways (e.g. safer route to school) and creation of new routes.

### C. Local Economy

Next to providing considerable health benefits, walking and cycling also play an important part as ‘co-benefits’ in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, conservation of land, air pollution, noise as well as traffic congestion – which contributes to economic prosperity. Co-benefits have been identified as an important area for collaboration, not least concerning climate change and carbon reduction.

If habitualised into the routines of daily living, cycling and walking among school children will help them to perform better at school academically (a key Education objective), and take less time off school through sickness. Following from this there is a good case that there will be a more educated workforce and being fitter will also take less sickness leave so contributing more to economic prosperity.

Department	Main benefits	Other benefits
Education	Strong evidence that in young people as physical activity increases academic performance improves	Impact on cognitive skills and attitudes and academic behaviour
Work and Pensions	Helping people get back to work	Reducing absenteeism and cost to economy
Energy and Climate Change	Reduction in transport-related greenhouse-gas emissions through less motor vehicle use and increases in distances walked and cycled	Increased energy security
Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs	Reduced carbon emissions from less motor vehicle use - improves air quality, reduced noise	Supporting rural economic agenda - tourism enabling better access to nature
Communities and Local Government	Support for high street vitality and social cohesion	Low carbon approach to access for growth areas
Business, Innovation and Skills	Physical activity, wellbeing and performance at work	Happiness advantage of positive psychology

Department for Transport – Investment in Walking and Cycling

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/371096/claiming\\_the\\_health\\_dividend.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/371096/claiming_the_health_dividend.pdf)

Public Health – Economic Assessment of Investment in Walking and Cycling  
<http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=91553>

Sustrans – Getting Britain Walking and Cycling  
<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/connect2/Getting%20Britain%20Cycling%20and%20Walking%20WEB.pdf>

Over a 12-month period from March 2012 to February 2013, the English adult population participated in an estimated 2.85 billion visits to the natural environment with a total visitor spend of £21 billion. In the English countryside walkers spend over £6 billion a year, supporting up to 245,000 full time jobs. The average spend per trip is £33.

[http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=5f752e3d-50b2-4f19-89ac-97d7547d1f4e](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=5f752e3d-50b2-4f19-89ac-97d7547d1f4e)

#### **D. Protection, Maintenance and the Definitive Map**

The new improvement plan will still have to address how to improve the overall condition of the network (measured at 60% in the 2014 ease of use surveys, down on previous years). Definitive map priorities will have to be assessed, especially in the light of the deregulation bill currently going through parliament, which will confirm 2026 as the cut off date for recording historic routes onto the map, and the continuing priorities to improve the network, which often rely on order making.

#### **Budgets**

Aspirations within the next ROWIP have to be tempered by a much more constrained budget than was available when ROWIP 1 was written. The following table illustrates budget reductions since 2010 -

##### Rights of Way and Access Revenue Budget

April 2010	£1.353 m
April 2011	£1.265 m
April 2012	£1.160 m
April 2013	£1.136 m
April 2014	£1.0668m

There will be further reductions over the next three years.

#### **Consultation Methods**

The existing RoWIP involved extensive consultations with numerous stakeholders. A number of workshops and focus groups were held; a summary leaflet was widely distributed and published on the Suffolk County Council website. In the current climate, resources will not allow for extensive consultations. During the production of the Suffolk Nature Strategy, a questionnaire was published using Survey Monkey. This was promoted and sent out to key stakeholders. In total they received two-hundred responses. Potentially

this could be a method used when producing the new RoWIP. Additionally consultation events could be held with access user groups.

### **SLAF Priorities**

Development of ROWIP 2 is still at an early stage, but at the meeting members of SLAF will be asked to comment on what their priorities for the new ROWIP would look like.

How would SLAF like to be involved in the development of ROWIP 2? At its last meeting, SLAF agreed a ROWIP working group consisting of Annette Ellis, Roley Wilson and Jane Hatton.

END

FC/SCC  
January 2015

## **RoWIP 2006-2016 Objectives**

### **Objective A – Provide a better signed, maintained and accessible network**

- A1. To improve investment in PRow
- A2. To effectively allocate maintenance resources
- A3. To improve (off road) way marking
- A4. New roadside signing programme
- A5. To keep paths mown to the appropriate standard
- A6. Remove unnecessary barriers
- A7. To increase the involvement and understanding of land managers in the management of PRow
- A8. To improve the reinstatement of cross field paths

### **Objective B – Provide and protect a more continuous network that provides for the requirements of all users**

- B1. Provide a more user focused and integrated approach to highways and PRow management
- B2. Promote the key role that PRow play in maintaining Suffolk's high quality of life within other strategies
- B3. To improve the development and protection of PRow through the planning process
- B4. Provide a more joined up and useable network
- B5. Improve access to and from Open Access land, recreation sites, and other public open spaces
- B6. Improve access to shops and other services
- B7. Increase the number and promotion of easy access routes, including access for wheelchair users
- B8. Improve routes between urban areas and the countryside

B9. Provide access to the surrounding countryside via PRow for settlements where there is a need

B10. Develop off-ford bridle and cycle routes with suitable surfacing to link to existing network

B.11 Protect and enhance PRow along the coast and estuaries

B.12 Increase opportunities to use public transport to access the countryside

B.13 Improve safe parking for horse boxes on/near bridleways

### **Objective C – Develop a Safer Network**

C1. Provide safe links between PRow along roads

C2. Improve safety of road and rail crossings

C3. Support the development of safe routes to schools using PRow to increase cycling and walking for students and their parents

C4. Ensure coastal and estuarine routes are safe to use

C5. Ensure the safety of all bridges on PRow

C6. Reduce conflict between cyclists, walkers and riders on multi-use routes

C7. Reduce the illegal use of PRow (e.g. illegal motorbikes, vehicles, and inappropriate use of byways)

C8. Reduce the impact of fly tipping on PRow

### **Objective D – Increase community involvement in improving and managing the network**

D1. Greater parish involvement in management of access

D2. To increase the involvement and understanding of land managers in the management of PRow

D3. Greater user group involvement in management of access

D4. Greater volunteer involvement in management of access

**Objective E – Produce an up to date and publicly available digitised Definitive Map for the whole of Suffolk**

- E1. Produce a consolidated definitive digital map
- E2. Produce a digital Definitive Map for Ipswich
- E3. Develop a public path and claims process that provides routes of public benefit

**Objective F – Improve promotion, understanding and use of the network.**

- F1. Better co-ordinated and higher quality promotion of countryside access
- F2. Brand Suffolk as a prime destination for walking, cycling and riding
- F3. Increase the number and promotion of easy access routes, including access for wheelchair users
- F4. Better public understanding of their responsibilities when using PRow and Open Access land
- F5. Identify areas of greatest potential to improve health
- F6. Publish Definitive Map to the web

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title: Network Rail – Public Rights of Way Level Crossings</b>	
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich</b>

## Introduction

This paper updates the forum on the main level crossings being addressed by Network Rail and Suffolk County Council.

## Needham Market Gipsy Lane and FP6



Following a meeting between Network Rail (NR), Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District Council, NR issued a joint statement on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014. An extract from that statement is reproduced below:-

*'Following a meeting on December 4<sup>th</sup> between Network Rail, Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District Council, Network Rail has confirmed that*

*it will not be pursuing the option of a stepped footbridge to replace Gipsy Lane level crossing in Needham Market.*

*After months of careful consideration and collaboration with local authorities, the option has been discounted to find a more accessible solution at Gipsy Lane.*

*The option of a stepped footbridge was discounted following a further feasibility study into options for the crossing, a thorough diversity and Inclusion study and feedback from the local community.'*

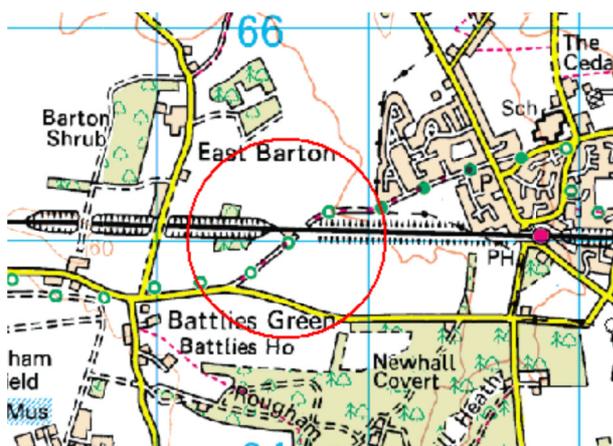
The two remaining options, the underpass and a ramped footbridge, are to be discussed again on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January at a meeting at Mid Suffolk's offices. The statement also indicates the underpass is the more expensive of the two options, would take longer to build and be more disruptive to the railway, all factors that NR say need careful consideration. At the moment though, there are no detailed plans indicating what the ramped footbridge would look like and how much land take would be required. The county council still considers a tunnel should be constructed and

will continue to press NR to deliver one. It would appear that both remaining options will require some input from the local planning authority.

Network Rail's latest comparative costs are:

Bridge with steps £3.48M  
 Bridge with ramps £4.25 M  
 Underpass £5.23M

## Great Barton Bridleway 12



NR largely finished building the ramped bridleway bridge by Christmas, although it would appear some further levelling/landscaping work is needed and this work is likely to be completed by mid-February. The county council received the completed rail crossing order form in early January. Officers have recently considered the order making request and have attributed it a high priority. Work is about to commence on this case. It is intended to

dedicate bridleway rights along the ramps and bridge decking and pedestrian rights up the two sets of steps. This will be followed by a rail crossing extinguishment order to stop up the at-grade crossing, based on safety grounds. It appears there may be some local opposition to the extinguishment, largely as a reaction to the planning justification for the bridge.

## Cotton Footpaths 13 and 15



These two footpath crossings are on the Ipswich to Norwich line. The county council has accepted the safety case to extinguish both these at-grade crossings and considers there are safer grade separated crossings nearby. NR applied to extinguish these on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2014. The county council has prioritised both the requests and officers are currently working on these. Both extinguishments will be consulted on at the same time.

## Suffolk Crossings Campaign

This informal group was formed recently to draw attention to NR's level crossing programme. It would appear the campaign has emerged as a result of misinformation that has ended up in the public domain. The group held a public meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014 in Stowmarket Community Centre, attended by many people, at which Network Rail gave a presentation and explained no decisions had been made on level crossing closures, and that full consultation would take place. This appeared to go some way to allaying local concerns.

Graham Newman, SCC Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning, has restated the county council's position on level crossings as follows:

*"Network Rail is investing in a wide-ranging and ambitious programme to make its level crossings safer. At some locations it would like to close level crossings completely.*

*In Suffolk, the programme is being led by Network Rail's Anglia route asset management team, to review the safety of all level crossings, as part of Network Rail's project to move operating centres in East Anglia to Romford. They are working with the county council and other organisations on a crossing by crossing basis. The county council's position in these discussions is that it wants to see safer level crossings and faster travel times on the county's railways. We will work with Network Rail to ensure the right balance is struck between safety, travel times and accessibility when proposals are put forward to close individual level crossings.*

*The council takes a proportionate and sensible approach to each crossing. Examples of this can be found at Cotton, on the Great Eastern main line, where the county council has accepted the case to close two unused footpath crossings where there is a nearby accessible alternative. At Gypsy Lane, Needham Market, however, the county council believes an accessible alternative must be provided at the site of the existing level crossing and is strongly supporting the local community in its demands for a tunnel.*

*The county council is keen to stress that no list for level crossing closures has been drawn up by the county council and the closure of level crossings could not happen without extensive consultation with local residents and other stakeholders, and strong evidence to suggest that the crossing should be closed. The county council will continue to urge Network Rail to develop a prioritised list of crossings to be addressed to enable a structured approach to be taken.*

*The county council will continue to advise Network Rail strongly of the need to consult with local communities at an early stage."*

END

AW/SCC  
January 2015

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title: A11 – Official Opening on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014</b>	
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich</b>

## Report

The A11 Fiveways to Thetford trunk road scheme was officially opened on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014 by Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary of State for Transport. Following that event, the non motorised user underpass was officially opened by Matthew Hancock, local MP.

Bryan Collen, David Barker, Anthony Wright and Jane Hatton (with TJ,) attended the underpass opening, which went very well. Graham Newman, Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning, gave a speech highlighting how the underpass would reconnect access in the Brecks, and acknowledged SLAF's input, Matthew Hancock MP then said a few words and cut a ribbon. County councillor Guy McGregor, who had been very supportive of SLAF's demands for an underpass in his previous role of portfolio holder for roads and transport, also attended the opening.

Encouragingly, two recreational cyclists from Somerset who were in the area enjoying the access network, also became part of the event when they tried to cycle through the underpass and found it blocked by dignitaries and ribbon!

The Rights of Way and Access team are working with David Falk in his new role as Brandon Country Park Manager to develop an access leaflet for the Brecks, which will promote access through the underpass.

## Natural England Local Access Forum Newsletter

If SLAF would like, a version of this paper could be submitted to Natural England for their next newsletter, with the addendum the underpass was secured only following a hard fought campaign by SLAF, with the assistance of the local British Horse Society, and an offer of c.£300,000 towards its estimated £1m cost (out of a scheme total of c. £102m).

## Other Matters

- Following the last SLAF meeting, the chairman wrote to Mark Hardingham, Chief Fire Officer and Corporate Lead for Public Protection, Highways and Transport, regarding provision for cyclists on the now de-trunked A11 at

Elveden. The letter is attached as appendix 1 and was acknowledged, pending a fuller response.

- Mike Taylor had hoped to give a presentation to SLAF today on A11 conservation mitigation, but this has been deferred to April's meeting as the negotiations are not yet complete.

### Photos from the Opening Event



### Appendix 1



LAF 1503 A11  
Update - Appendix 1.

END  
AW/SCC  
January 2015

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

SLAF  
PO Box 872  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP1 9JW

Mark Hardingham  
Chief Fire Officer, Public Protection  
Suffolk County Council  
Endeavour House  
Russell Road  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP1 2BX

Tel: 01473 264759  
Fax: 01473 216877  
Email: [slaf@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:slaf@suffolk.gov.uk)  
Web: <http://publicrightsofway.onesuffolk.net/suffolk-local-access-forum>

Your Ref:  
Our Ref: BC/JC  
Date: 11 November 2014

Dear Mr Hardingham

**Re: A11 Fiveways to Thetford Improvement**

I am writing regarding the lack of information and apparent lack of commitment to provide the promised cycle facilities alongside the de trunked section of the former A11 between Thetford and Elveden.

To assist you I have provided a potted history of the events thus far:

- During the 2001 consultation for the A11 Fiveways to Thetford improvements, the County's Cycling Officers identified a desire to improve cycling between Thetford and Elveden. Their idea was to convert the existing footway into a shared use cycle track. Following the consultation, the Highways Agency commissioned Jacobs to undertake a feasibility study. The resulting study published in 2009 confirmed the appropriateness of the proposal and the Highways Agency adopted the recommendations in principle, stating that these works would only be carried out when the new section of the A11 was fully opened.
- Subsequently, the Highways Agency was directed to reduce the cost of the project, resulting in a reduction of running lane widths and a review of ancillary works such as the proposed cycle facility.
- In 2011 the Highways Agency revised their proposal in favour of removal of the centre line marking with on-road advisory cycle lanes.
- Suffolk Local Access Forum's preferred option is for a shared use off-road facility that will encourage recreational use and commuting between Thetford and Eleven by non-motorised users (NMUs).
- In 2014 the information received from the managing agent Balfour Beatty is that an unspecified cycling facility would now be delivered by Suffolk County Council.

Can you please confirm who will be delivering the NMU facility, what type of facility will be provided and the timescale for these works?

Yours sincerely



pp

Bryan Collen  
Chairman, Suffolk Local Access Forum

CC:

Councillor Graham Newman, Suffolk County Council.

Councillor. Guy McGregor, Suffolk County Council.

Peter Grimm, Suffolk County Council.

Steve Boor, Suffolk County Council.

Dave Watson, Suffolk County Council.

Alan Thorndyke, Suffolk County Council

Anthony Wright, Sustrans.

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>LAF Regional Meeting at Cambridge on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Barker</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich</b>

This regional meeting was held at the Natural England office in Cambridge Fiona Taylor and Giles Merritt of Natural England attended with representatives from 8 LAF's.

I raised under the minutes from the previous meeting the opening of the A11 I explained the road will be officially opened next Friday. An under pass linking both sides of the new road section has been achieved as a result of the campaign lead by Suffolk LAF along with BHS and support from ramblers, cyclists etc. Originally no link was provided but due to the campaign and after financial support from SCC the decision to provide an underpass near the war memorial at Elveden was achieved. This must be used as a marker for future road schemes

The National Annual report all except Thurrock LAF contributed.

A discussion about support given to LAF's some receive little or no local authority support, we are I said very fortunate in Suffolk to receive very good support and input from the County and District Councils.

DEFRA guidance this good practice handbook is out of date any suggestions to be included in a new one should be sent to Margaret Shaw of Essex LAF.

An annual one day conference is to be held in February in London or Birmingham one delegate per LAF it was said the date needs to be fixed ASAP

Question was asked do LAF's have AGM's? Some did some did not we have an annual agenda item. With regard to recruitment almost all stated they have problems attracting younger people and many had poor attendance from local authorities. Many have evening meetings. Many LAF's make own appointments I said I was very glad in Suffolk appointments are done by SCC. The problem of budget cuts is affecting many LAF's. There is a problem in some counties with a lack of cutting of Rights of Way.

A presentation was given by Ray Booty on the New Anti-Social, Crime and Policing Act 2014. There is a long list of area's to be addressed. Public Space Protection Orders can be used at a particular nuisance to protect communities. These orders are made by District/Borough Councils there needs to be 3 cases within 6 months and the community involved/police/ police commissioner and Highways Authority are part of the process. I was told these replace `Gating Orders` and LAF's are no longer a statutory consultee.

Giles Merritt gave a presentation on `Access to the English Coast` there are 5 delivery teams (one in East) aim to complete by 2020!

Norfolk is being done as the first phase Palling to Weybourne is the area being done at the moment, it is a 4 meter wide path, when Norfolk is completed the team will move to Suffolk. Essex is the most difficult part due to all the estuaries.

I lead the next item with regard to Network Rail and the problem of rail crossings in general and Gypsy Lane at Needham Market in particular. Beds LAF also have problems with rights of way being closed across railway lines; this seemed to be a widespread problem for LAF's.

We were asked about links with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's) and Local Nature Partnerships.

Urban area's not having a definitive map was highlighted as a problem Colchester and Chelmsford were complete but Luton and Bedford were not.

The damage to byways by 4WD's was mentioned.

Councils not consulting LAF's with regard to Rights of Way affected by development were an issue.

Lack of Landowners on Essex LAF is a problem.

Herts LAF have a lack of funding. I suggested that in the run up to the general election this should be taken up with Parliamentary candidates.

We had an update on Natural England Stewardship Schemes.

The LEADER programme has the ability to deliver better access also Paths 4 Communities; this gives £46 per square meter. It is on Huddle.

A discussion on Huddle which passed me by!

Green space mapping was mentioned.

END

David Barker

7<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Natural England Correspondence</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29 January 2015</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich</b>

## **Introduction**

This paper updates the forum on the following correspondence received from Natural England:

- East of England Local Access Forums Chairs and Vice-Chairs' Regional Meeting Thursday 4th December 2014 – Appendix 1
- Standard Access and Engagement paragraphs for response to draft strategies – Appendix 2
- National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014 – Appendix 3

LAF 2015 conference – Natural England have advised the regional coordinators has been postponed mainly due to budget pressures and over the coming months NE aims to get a wider range of contributions and commitments to an event later in the year.

**East of England Local Access Forums  
Chairs and Vice-Chairs' Regional Meeting**

**Thursday 4th December 2014 11.00am – 3.00pm**

**Natural England Offices  
Room 1/54, Eastbrook, Shaftesbury Road Cambridge CB2 8DR**

**MINUTES**

**Attendees**

David Barker - Vice-Chairman Suffolk LAF (DB)  
Dr Keith Bacon - Chair Broads LAF (KB)  
Pauline Hey - Chair Central Bedfordshire and Luton JLAF (PH)  
Mary Sanders - Chair Cambridgeshire LAF (MS)  
Roger Buisson - Cambridgeshire LAF (RB)  
Robert Johnson - Chair Essex LAF (RJ)  
Ray Booty - Vice-Chairman Essex LAF (RaB)  
Liddy Lawrence - Chair Herts LAF (LL)  
Roger Thomas - Vice Chair Herts LAF (RT)  
Stephen Horner - Peterborough LAF (SH)  
Ann Kennedy - Borough of Bedford LAF (AK)  
Margaret Shaw - East of England Regional LAF Co-ordinator (MSh)  
Fiona Taylor - Natural England Area 8 Partnerships Team, **Note-taker** (FT)  
Giles Merritt - Natural England Area 8 Partnerships Team (GM)

**Apologies:** Peter Medhurst - Vice Chair Broads Authority; Steve Bumstead Chair Borough of Bedford LAF; Paula Watts Thurrock LAF; Don Saunders Chair Norfolk LAF.

***Congratulations!***

*To Regional Co-ordinator, Michelle Gardiner, on the birth of her daughter from us all. Mother and baby are doing well!*

**Minutes of Chairs and Vice-Chairs' Regional Meeting 25<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and notes from Regional Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

**Matters arising not covered on agenda**

Congratulations to Suffolk LAF: DB reported on the successful installation of an underpass under the A11 at Elvedon following a concerted campaign for one by the LAF and the local community.

Minutes to be amended to indicate apologies from SH on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2014 PH to ensure Bob Wallace's guide to educate new council members is re-circulated.

## **National update – MSh**

### **Annual report**

MSh thanked everyone for a 90% submission to Natural England of Annual Reports. (only Thurrock was missing). Southend-on Sea will be encouraged to form a LAF especially in light of Deputy PM's Coastal Access statement.

### **Annual review form**

Most LAF secretaries enter the data and send out to members for their comments/contribution.

Any feedback on the content of the form is welcomed. MSh will request a breakdown of membership type on LAFs (e.g. cyclist, landowner, etc.).

LAFs will be encouraged to submit two areas of work of which they are most proud. This is important as the completed report is sent to the Minister.

### **LAF Engagement plan**

Has been updated. MSh to circulate. It is also available on Huddle:

(cut & paste link) <https://my.huddle.net/workspace/13106522/files/#/24002279>.

Discussion re whether LAFs had a focus on delivery or consultation – this varied across region. Working sub-groups suggested as a way to take forward delivery of projects.

### **Defra guidance, Good Practice Guides, Handbook for members**

To be updated to include: joint LAFs, sub-groups, links to LNP etc. All to provide info on what you'd like to see included.

The handbook will be withdrawn and replaced with a series of Good Practice Guides. The first 14 are available on Huddle.

### **National conference**

Will be held in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> week in Feb 2015 comprising a single meeting in Birmingham or London. 1 place per LAF will be offered to LAF chairs (can send substitute). Workshop presenters can attend in addition to their LAF's delegate. Accommodation and expenses to be met by Appointing Authorities (AA).

Call for workshop content. Suggestions: Neighbourhood Planning, Setting up a fund-raising arm.

However, LAFs are not self-funding bodies:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/268/regulation/12/made>

## **Post Meeting Note: National Conference postponed until later in 2015**

MSh drew attention to **Outdoor Recreation Network** which LAFs may find useful:

<http://www.outdoorrecreation.org.uk/>

## **Recruitment, Role and Succession Planning**

*Do all LAFs have an AGM?* Discussion: most do, or have formal part where Chair and Vice Chairs are elected, normally part of the larger meeting. Some have a rule of re-election of posts after 3 years to ensure a fresh approach; members can't stand for re-election straight away. Others ensure the position of Chair alternates between a user and a landowner. One LAF elects its new Chair from previous Vice Chair (to give continuity, and a chance to up-skill the Chair before they take on the role, etc.). Peterborough are trying a rotating Chair role.

*How to recruit younger members?* Ideas discussed: Approaching Young farmers groups, other volunteer groups with cross-over interest, e.g. wildlife, historic, scouting/guiding groups. Approach University students: role is useful for careers (being member of a board, working on strategic decisions, etc.). PhD preferable as students are full-time not just term time.

*Ethnic minority groups?* GM to send A2N link from Luton Council of Faiths – similar groups in other areas who could be approached? Council of Faiths exist in most areas.

*General recruitment* All attempt to have a membership of certain target groups, e.g. user types, landowners, anglers etc.

Use member contacts to find new members or approach societies (e.g. Angling Society, Cycling/ horse-riding groups, Landowners from [CLA](#) or [NFU](#)).

*Councillors* (District Council or County Council) from personal contact/ approach. Need to be considered as an official outside appointee on LAF for admin purposes. Such appointments made after elections.

*Timing of meetings considered?* Day/eve? LAFs flexible. Where meetings held during the day, working members take leave/ time off to attend.

Field trips with pub lunch as an attraction to join.

AA advertise if new members required.

Printed copies of application form suggested for those with a keen interest to be recruited on the spot (otherwise tend not to fill application form in).

Process of recruitment: each member approved by full council. Others delegate to lead officer or signed off by LAF themselves (possible loss of standing in Council?)

*Members of public attending?* Yes – varying numbers from few and rarely to regular and large numbers - often related to what's on agenda and whether meeting publicised/ easy to see on websites.

Some AAs advertise LAF meetings by press release (cost effective).

Some advise every Parish Council of meeting dates.

## **Resources – managing LAFs and their work with decreasing local authority budgets**

All agreed decreasing budgets were affecting all aspects of RoW (maintenance, creation, support of LAFs, etc.).

*Suggestions:*

- clarify what's not being done and engage councillors re tackling shortfalls;
- liaise with MPs who understand the importance of PRow and LAF work;
- make face to face contact with new members, planners, highways, etc people who may be new in their posts and establish what needs to be sent to you for comment. Can planners automatically flag up an issue if a proposal is within x distance of a RoW for example? LAs hold the DM&S.

LAFs need to re-establish importance of being consulted on RoW affected proposals;

Advice for Planning permission should follow guidelines:

[http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees\\_forms/form-explanatory-notes.pdf](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees_forms/form-explanatory-notes.pdf)

*Public Rights of Way*

*Where a public right of way exists within or adjoining the site of the proposed development this must be clearly identified on all location or site plans.*

*A public right of way is a highway which any member of the public may use but which is not a highway maintained by a government department.*

*It is usual to retain a public right of way and where appropriate, incorporate the path as an integral part of the proposed development.*

*Where however, it is proposed to divert or extinguish a public right of way, you should discuss this at an early stage with your District Council.*

*Depending on the circumstances they may consider making an Order to divert or extinguish the right of way.*

*You should be aware that the Department also has powers to make Orders diverting or extinguishing rights of way to enable development to be carried out.*

*If you are in any doubt about the existence of a public right of way, or if you need further information, you should consult the District Council concerned.*

- election due – good potential candidates to approach? Research;
- many have PRowS re-organised into Highways departments with detrimental effect on PRow. Need to engage Highways staff re RoW issues;
- staffing levels cut and where services contracted out, the company may not be interested in PRow;
- engage highways and agree ways of working;
- Ramblers couldn't give their HA money for maintenance as the contract is privately run!
- Community Payback have been used successfully
- s94 statement useful for engaging organisations in consultation with LAFs (MSh to circulate examples)

**New Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014**

RaB delivered an interesting talk on this new piece of legislation which effectively replaces Gating Orders. (attached)

**English National Coastal Path**

GM updated with progress on this piece of work. (attached)

Reminder of the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/deputy-prime-minister-speech-on-the-state-of-uk-nature>

### **LAF representation on LNPs and LEPs in the region**

MS gave an insight into her work on her local LNP: "Natural Cambridgeshire" (covers Peterborough Unitary Authority, too). Richard Astle is new chair. Launch included talks from two large developers (Urban and Civic and O&H). Not much activity since. Some AAs have made the link between LAF and LNP. But little contact between LAFs and LEPs. An access voice is needed on these bodies as some not that keen on it!

### **National Rail Crossings –**

DB introduced this topic with reference to crossing closures in Suffolk.

– discussion re part LAFs have played in ensuring enough good quality (accessible) crossings for non-motorised users.

Comments re proposals, engaging consultants at LAF meetings, etc.

Potential flooding often cited as reason for underpasses not being a viable alternative, but have been successfully challenged (e.g. incorrect water table data). Local MPs have been helpful and public meetings well attended. Solutions need to be acceptable to local people.

Not much used is often cited (but often because it's not safe to do so).

Also need to future proof crossings for any new housing developments, new cycling routes, etc.

Most felt NR were listening. Cross LA border can be challenging – have 2 sets of consultants to deal with.

Some landowners attempting to close dead-end routes created following closures.

### **Issues affecting your LAFs**

Can't meet in pub any longer (Health and Safety issue for minute-taker given as reason).

Some areas still unmapped and not on DMS – some because they are town – but not all. Has planning implications.

Byways and bridleways damaged by vehicles, and sometimes horses. Seasonal TROs not always the answer (ignored). Use of police to stop vehicles (other Road Traffic Act offences dealt with).

Success story in Broads Authority: improvement from industrial riverside walk into Norwich City to tourist attraction.

Q re OS maps showing green dots (Other Road with Public Access) may not be on DMS but may be on List of Streets. Public access will be on foot at least, possibly higher rights? Check with HA.

Concern with Deregulation Bill 2026 deadline. Historic Paths not claimed will be lost forever. Should LAF be checking unclaimed routes?

### **Natural England update (inc NELMS, LEADER funding Natural England website, newsletters and reports)**

FT gave update:

#### **NELMS**

Now called **Countryside Stewardship**. New leaflet produced.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cap-reform-december-2014-update>

The leaflet explains the different elements of the scheme, including focus on:

- Maintaining permanent grassland
- Crop diversification
- Ecological Focus Areas

Greening is compulsory: 30% at risk if farmer does not comply. Some exemptions. Determined by area of land: > size > diversification and EFA.

Min plot size 0.01ha; May-June inspection period. EFAs 5% of arable land on holding, eg. Hedges, buffer strips along water courses; fallow land; N fixing crops; catch and cover crops.

- “How Countryside Stewardship works”
  - *Higher Tier* (similar to HLS)
    - SSSIs and woodlands (complex mgmt.)
  - *Mid Tier* (will replace ELS)
    - reducing DWP, >farmland birds and pollinators
    - Scheme targeting and scoring
  - *Capital grants*
    - sep from Higher Tier or Mid Tier
  - *Applications online*
  - *The Wild Pollinator and Farm Wildlife Package*
    - lowland areas
  - *How applications are scored*
    - national targeting framework priorities & options chose. Details Jan 2015
  - Some agreements >5yrs, most last 5
  - Funding available in 2015
    - Water Capital Grants
      - Reduce water pollution from agriculture
    - Woodland Creation Grants
      - Accepted for a limited time from Feb 2015
  - Facilitation funding
  - How and when to apply for Countryside Stewardship
  - Greening ‘double funding’ and Countryside Stewardship

- 19 CS options count as double-funding if they're also used to meet Ecological Focus Area requirements for Basic Payment Scheme

Whilst Countryside Stewardship will be the successor to Environmental Stewardship (ES), English Woodland Grant Scheme and capital grants from the Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme, it is important to note that the majority of our current agri-environment agreement holders will remain in ES for many years to come.

### **LEADER**

A number of LEADER areas successful at this stage of process. But appeal process on-going; therefore need to wait confirmation from Defra re successful areas. Proposal for Innovation Funds from Natural England to follow.

### **Natural England website**

Now moved under the Gov.uk website – but everything should still be available. LAF newsletter – largely about conferences. New one in preparation. P4C report – headlines: invested in over 183km PRoW; created over 76km new (55km of which bridleway, 21km footpath); improvement of 107km existing PRoW. Total cost £46/m, surfacing alone £20/m. Much access info available via Huddle, too.

### **Huddle**

Mixed views but not much activity. Most use links but MSh also provides summaries.

### **AOB**

The DPM also announced plans to map every publicly accessible green space in England & Wales. Greenspace mapping: what's the smallest area that can/ will be mapped? Intended to show you the location of your nearest park and greenspace. Conducted by OS.

<http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/about/news/2014/deputy-pm-announces-plans-for-new-map-of-accessible-green-space-using-os-data.html>

### **Future meetings**

Likely to be May 2015.

<b>Action summary</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>
Minutes of Coton meeting – amend to show apologies of SH	MSh
Re-circulate Bob Wallace's Guide to New Members	PH
Two examples of good work from LAFs for next Annual Report	ALL
Defra guidance, Good Practice Guides, Handbook for members – what would you like to see included?	ALL

Link to Luton Council of Faiths contact for LAF membership (Access to Nature project)	GM
Share S94 statement used for consultations	MSh
Share presentation re ASBCP Act	RaB /MSh
Financial implications of planning consent over PRow – example to share	FT

## Standard Access and Engagement paragraphs for response to draft strategies

Dear [enter name]

Thank you for sending [document title] for Natural England's comments.

Natural England supports designs for outdoor spaces that, through an integrated Ecosystem Approach to land management, deliver multiple benefits to people and wildlife. [[Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network](http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf) (<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>)]

Natural England also supports better access to greenspaces close to where people live. Evidence from shows that over two thirds of visits taken in England are close to home (68% within 2 miles) and that participation in visits over the previous week by residents of each region is likely associated with the amount of locally available greenspace. [[MENE](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/1712385?category=47018) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/1712385?category=47018>)].

We support designs that seek to achieve this through increasing the amount of greenspaces and improving the quality of greenspaces that communities have access to. [['Nature Nearby' Accessible Natural Greenspace guidance](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40004) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40004>)].

Natural England supports strategies for greenspace and green infrastructure provision that are accompanied by sustainable management mechanisms to ensure high quality provision for communities into the future.

### Access

Design for open spaces should include elements that enable communities to access their local green spaces, along permanent green corridors using non-motorised means of transport. For those visitors from further afield, some means of public transport to the natural environment linking sites with rail or bus stations and local overnight stay provision, will provide opportunities for eco-tourism.

Green infrastructure provided for access delivers, along with hedges, verges and trees, a wildlife corridor linking areas specially managed for their conservation value. This will promote increased biodiversity and ensure wildlife is able to adapt to changes in climate. [[Natural England's climate change risk assessment and adaptation plan](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/216300) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/216300>)]

Tree planting will provide shade and reduction in the heat island effect associated with anticipated increased temperatures, whilst greenspaces, rivers, streams and swales, and [Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems](#) provide effective flood risk management.

Open spaces providing a setting for sport, recreation, and outdoor play, encourages the use of the outdoors for health reasons and contributes toward Local Authority targets under the Public Health Outcomes framework 1.16 .

Natural England supports mechanisms for managing and addressing issues of access alongside conservation objectives such that access to the natural environment is encouraged. **[anyone know of any good quality evidence we can share in relation to this point?]**

## Engagement

Natural England also supports strategies that encourage better engagement with the natural environment: encouraging people to support their natural environments and delivering more benefits to people and wildlife via sustainable land use that delivers multiple benefits through:

- advocacy for nature within their communities
- lobbying of elected representatives to fund and provide quality greenspaces and access **[can we say this?]**
- making more sustainable life choices, such as recycling, buying goods of local provenance
- shared experiences at cultural events improving social capital and cohesion
- acting to improve their local places by volunteering and learning new skills
- create opportunities for schools, colleges and universities to incorporate learning in natural environments into their everyday teaching, strengthening learning experiences across the curriculum and improving the health and wellbeing of students and pupils
- creating learning opportunities for interest groups and clubs, and for the leisure visitor, adding educational value to eco-tourism
- creating opportunities for opening the outdoors to as wide an audience as possible, providing an inclusive and welcoming resource for people of all ages, ethnicities, gender, and abilities including people with permanent/ temporary limited mobility or sensory function

- opportunities for expanding economic activity with local produce (allotments, community orchards, farmers' markets, coppicing, etc)
- sustainable transport: access that extends beyond the footprint of the design area and that makes strategic links to the wider Public Rights of Way network and other non-motorised use routes, providing sustainable transport routes to access services, travel for work and leisure.

A multi-functional approach which recognises the value of nature [[The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature](#) (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>)] and the services that ecosystems deliver, delivers sustainable ways of improving the quality of people's lives and delivering economic benefits.

Strategic evidence and advice summary:

- [Biodiversity 2020 – A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#) (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020-111111.pdf>)
- [UK National Ecosystem Assessment](#) (<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>)
- [The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature](#) (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>)
- ['Nature Nearby' Accessible Natural Greenspace guidance](#) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40004>)
- [Natural England's climate change risk assessment and adaptation plan](#) (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/216300>)
- [Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network](#) (<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>)
- [Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#) (<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/research/mene.aspx>)

# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

## Contents

Foreword by Natural England .....	2
1. Introduction .....	3
2. How LAFs operate .....	4
3. LAF achievements .....	5
3.1 LAF activities .....	5
3.2 Consultations and partnerships (comparing 2014 and 2013).....	10
4. LAF communications and events .....	11
4.1 Huddle: internet based network to share information .....	11
4.2 LAF conference.....	11
4.3 LAF Newsletter .....	12
5. Engagement with other bodies.....	12
6. Links with Natural England.....	13
7. Advice and guidance .....	14
8. Reporting process .....	14
9. Issues and challenges identified by LAFs .....	15
10. Appointing authority feedback .....	16

# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

## Foreword by Natural England

I am delighted to introduce Natural England's third annual report to Defra on the work that Local Access Forums achieved during the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. Once again there are many examples of how LAFs are advising their appointing authorities, and other bodies with responsibility for public access, on improving the opportunities for outdoor recreation whilst taking into account the needs of land management and nature conservation.

In selecting activities to add to this national annual report we sought examples where LAFs demonstrated how they had made a difference to the access provided in practical ways. The report below summarises many of these examples such as identifying specific places where the Public Rights of Way network could be improved for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders as well as for those with limited mobility. One LAF had directly influenced the removal of stiles and gates where not required for land management and one had managed a grant scheme to support improvements to the network. Others had supported funding bids such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Natural England's Paths for Communities scheme. Some LAFs have monitored the standard of maintenance of routes and one had developed a volunteering programme to help look after local paths.

LAFs have also contributed to a wide range of public consultations seeking to reduce impacts on existing public access whilst maximising improvements. They have raised awareness of disability needs, opened dialogue with landowners and sought to increase land manager representation on LAFs, and they have brought together diverse views to seek solutions to issues such as vehicular use of Public Rights of Way and the behaviour of dog owners and their pets.

Many LAFs have begun to consider the ten year review of their Rights of Way Improvement Plan and have advised their local authority on future priorities. Some have sought to link with other local networks such as Health and Wellbeing Boards and Local Enterprise Partnerships to demonstrate the importance of good public access to health and to tourism. All important if LAFs are to be effective at showing the relevance of public access to the issues that are high on local agendas. Success has varied and where progress has been made we encourage LAFs to share this so that other LAFs may benefit from the experience.

This annual report combines the headlines from the LAF annual reports along with results from the annual survey of LAF Chairs and Secretaries. The survey informs Natural England and Defra on the type of support LAFs seek and influences the way that we provide that support. Many of the themes and issues emerging from the LAF survey and cited in this annual report will be the topics of discussion in the regular LAF Newsletter, on Huddle and at the annual conference to be held in 2015.

This report will be used to raise the awareness of the LAF collective contribution to public access and comes with great appreciation for the voluntary contribution that individual members make. The report will be used to raise the profile of this contribution with Ministers, government departments, local authorities, and all organisations involved in the delivery of public access to the natural environment.

Wendy Thompson  
Natural England Principal Adviser, Access and Engagement  
October 2014

# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

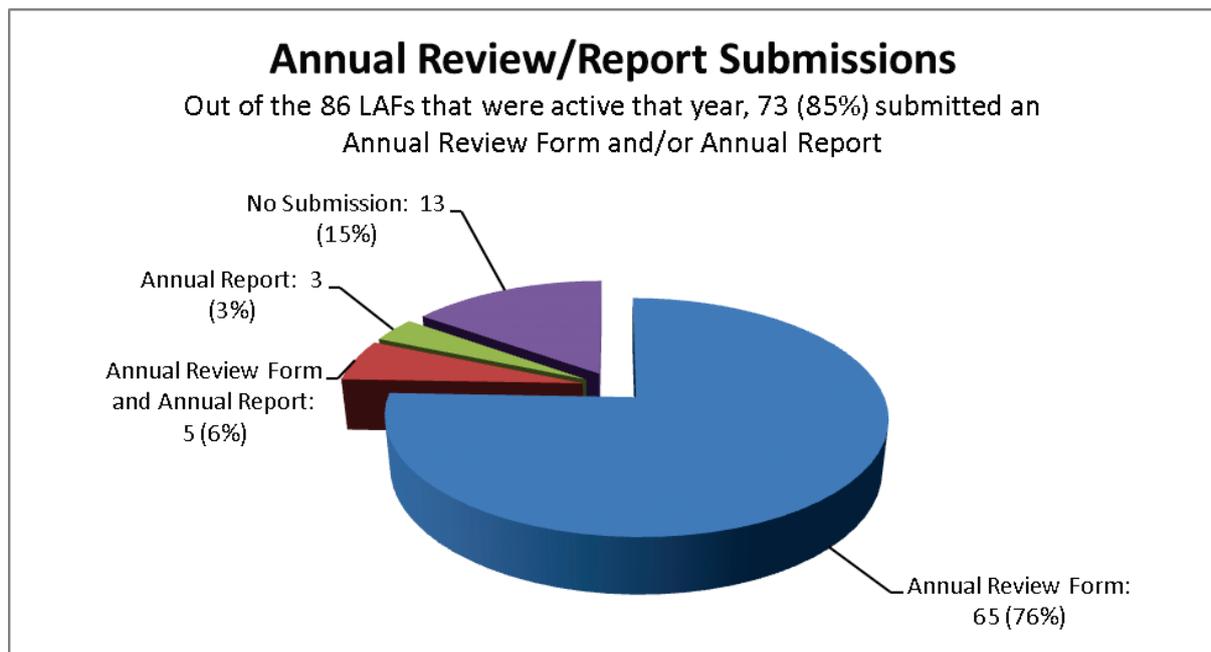
## 1. Introduction

Natural England has responsibilities set out in the CROW Act (section 19 of the 2007 regulations for Local Access Forums) to receive annual reports from all LAFs. This report summarises all of the LAF annual reports received covering the period April 2013 to March 2014. The report highlights some of the achievements reported, provides statistics on LAFs and the activities they have undertaken, identifies issues and makes recommendations on improvements that could be made.

LAFs were asked to submit an annual report to Natural England, by the 30th June 2014. The LAF Regional Coordinators produced summary reports for their region which have also been used to inform this report. In addition we conducted an online survey between 13<sup>th</sup> March and 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014 amongst LAF Chairs and Secretaries. The results have also been fed into this report. All of the charts in this report are prepared from data submitted on the Annual Review Form or to the Annual Survey.

Last year's report was published in February 2014. For this report we have brought the publication date to October 2014 and our thanks go to the LAFs and Regional Coordinators for bringing their respective submissions forward to enable us to produce a more timely report.

The final submission results are as follows:

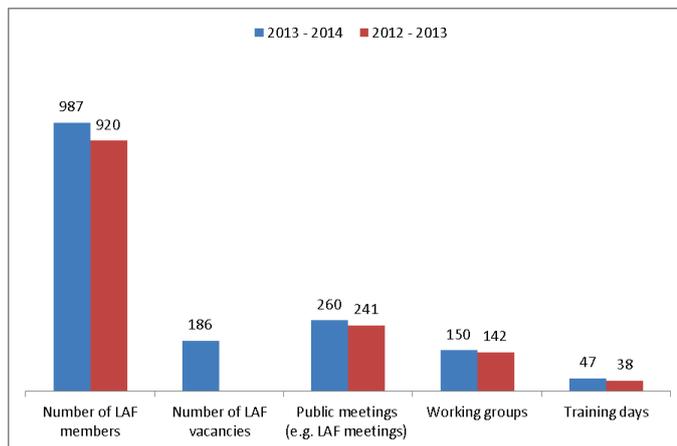


# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

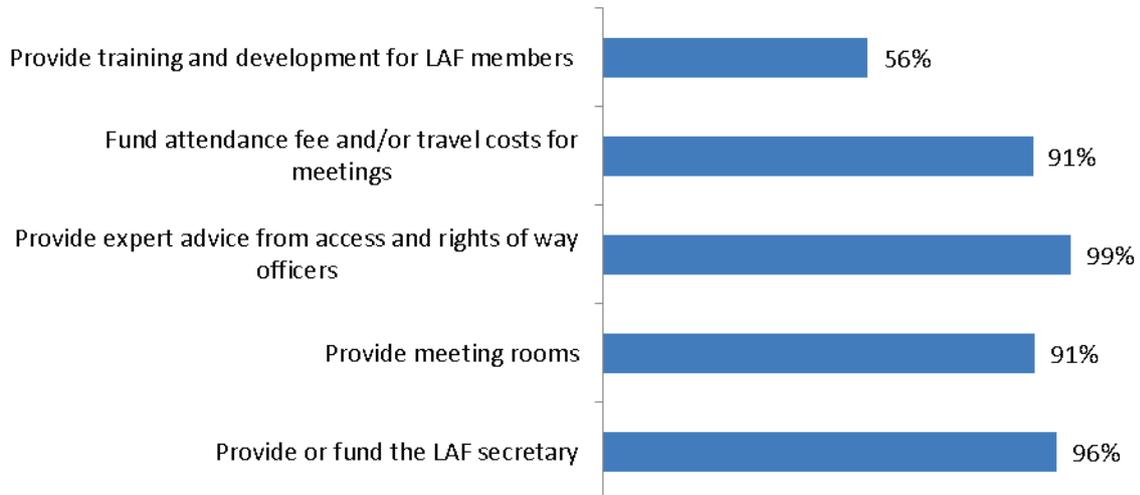
## 2. How LAFs operate

Over the last 12 months most LAFs (59%) retained the same number of members; 17% had increased and 23% had decreased.

Most LAFs (57%) met more than 3 times a year and only 14% met less than twice during the previous year, 94% of meetings had more than half of their members attending.



In general LAFs received good support from their appointing authority but notably a small minority are not employing a secretary, or funding member expenses, contrary to the legislation that established LAFs and supporting regulations (The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007).



Over half of LAFs (57%) operated sub groups, who met at variable intervals throughout the year. These groups covered a wide range of topics from practical matters relating to routes and open spaces, partnership working to develop new approaches as well as the preparation of plans and strategies. Sub-groups reported back to their LAF in a variety of different ways.

# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

## 3. LAF achievements

### 3.1 LAF activities

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. More details about the achievements of the LAFs are available from the 2013 – 2014 Regional Reports on the LAF Huddle workspace.

**Bury LAF** held its first meeting on 11th September 2013 and began by setting out the four priority issues for members:

1. Misuse of the countryside by off road vehicles;
2. The condition of the Public Rights of Way Network;
3. The lack of implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan with particular regard to bridleways;
4. The protection of open spaces from proposed development, including wind turbines and wind farms.

During the first three meetings there was much discussion relating to these issues and other topics including:

- The Definitive Map and Statement - The LAF expressed a desire for the Authority's definitive rights of way records to be reviewed and updated. The last review was carried out by Greater Manchester Council in 1984.
- Identification of horse riding routes around Ainsworth and Elton Reservoir. - Some members had researched the demand for horse riding routes in the west of the borough and suggested possible routes.
- Greenmount Village Hiking Group proposal to create a West Pennine Moors Way, including a link to the Pennine Way. Members of the group offered support and advice as to how best to take this forward.
- The creation of a circular walk linking the rural communities in the north of the borough. Almost all of the work on this "Village Link" has been the responsibility of one of the LAF members through her role in the Bury Rural Inequalities Forum. The LAF provided and support and advice to this initiative.

**Central Bedfordshire and Luton JLAF** worked closely with Central Bedfordshire Council Officers on the review of the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP). Following adoption of the plan, the LAFs focus moved to agreeing the annual action plan and monitoring progress against the agreed actions at six monthly intervals. The LAF also provided support for a Paths for Communities project to create a new cycle path to the West of Biggleswade and provided input to the proposed level crossing closures on the East Coast Main Line.

**Cheshire East LAF** members used their local knowledge to advise on five major road schemes that all had implications for non-motorised users, and required comment from the LAF. The LAF contributed to the pre-submission consultation on the local authority's Core Strategy, emphasising (among other points) the importance of access and rights of way to tourism and the rural economy, and the LAF's views were incorporated into the finished version. The LAF was also active in surveying routes for Cheshire East's booklet "Walks for All 2" and emphasised walks which can be reached without a car, and which are located on urban fringes.

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

**Cumbria LAF** advised Natural England on the roll-out of the England Coast Path and attended the opening of the first stretch in Cumbria in April 2014 (Allonby to Whitehaven – 35km). The Cumbria LAF (along with the Lake District National Park LAF) has also been involved in several meetings and discussions with Natural England on the proposals for the second stretch between Whitehaven and Silecroft (55km) which were published in October 2014. Both LAFs provided local advice and information on specific access challenges on the proposed route. More recently, the Cumbria LAF provided information on existing access opportunities and issues on the third stretch of coast, where work began in September 2014.

Natural England staff reported that Cumbria LAF were particularly keen to get involved in the planning of Coastal Access. They welcomed regular briefings from Natural England at their meetings, and were proactive in providing advice and support.

**Devon Countryside Access Forum's** Chairman initiated a meeting with the local authority lead on the Local Nature Partnership and the Head of Health Improvement for South and West Devon. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss shared objectives and the development of a Naturally Healthy Task and Finish Group. This group was set up and included representatives from a number of organisations and further information on its outputs will be available for the 2014-15 annual report. The Devon Local Nature Partnership launched its 5 year prospectus early in 2014. Being naturally healthy is one of the seven priority themes underpinning the three aims to:

1. Protect and improve Devon's natural environment
2. Grow Devon's green economy
3. Reconnect Devon's people with nature.

**Dudley LAF** developed and launched a volunteering programme in conjunction with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Countryside Service. Volunteering focussed mainly on the Coombeswood Green Wedge site that the LAF had been very interested in for the last few years. The programme was beneficial in getting members of the LAF out working with local Friends groups to help maintain some important parts of the path network in the borough. It has allowed members to have greater variety in terms of their involvement beyond just attending meetings.

The LAF also provided training for local authority staff and members on the Equalities Act, 2010 and how this applies to public access. The Equalities courses were run by Access in Dudley which is the organisation headed up by the current LAF chair, Tina Boothroyd. It was an opportunity to educate Council Officers and LAF members regarding disability awareness issues in the outdoors and utilised a nature reserve site (Wren's Nest). The site had recently benefitted from investment through the Heritage lottery Fund so parts of the site had been upgraded specifically to improve disabled access whilst other parts remain inaccessible to some people with special access requirements owing to the topography of the site. The LAF advised that the site provided a good test case to show what improvements can be made to support accessibility at natural sites (not just steps and gradients but also raising awareness about other issues such as colour contrasts, vegetation management and textures.).

**East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston upon Hull Joint LAF.** Members of the JLAF worked with East Riding of Yorkshire Council and other organisations such as GLASS (representing the protection of Green Lanes) and LARA (representing responsible motorised recreation) to help with the development of a Policy for the Management of Unmetalled Highways and Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs). The Policy which has now been formally adopted by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council shows how positive engagement between the Council, the JLAF, and in particular GLASS and

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

LARA has led to a workable and sustainable way forward for these valuable countryside assets, and for everyone that uses "green lanes" for access and recreation.

Two farming JLAF members were actively involved in promoting the ideas of positive access and have opened up dialogue between landowners for the benefit of all who use the countryside for access and recreation. Drawing on their keen interest in conservation as well as their extensive farming and land management knowledge, an article was published, and well received, in the national Country Land and Business Association Magazine. This was an excellent way of promoting the role of LAFs to the land-owning community.

**East Sussex LAF** provided advice on the management of public vehicle access along Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs). This involved making recommendations regarding seasonal traffic regulation orders and input into a 'byway user' leaflet. The Forum provided guidance regarding two contentious path diversions (to Network Rail and Southern Water respectively). The LAF also reviewed and investigated specific ROWIP aims and provided advice to the Access Authority on priorities. The LAF provided advice to Natural England and Defra regarding decadal reviews of open access land as there is a specific issue about missing detail in the Sussex area.

**Essex LAF** had significant input into Essex highway authority proposal to close byways and to their proposed hierarchy for Public Rights of Way maintenance due to budget reductions, with proposals being amended in response to LAF comments. Essex Highways proposed a blanket closure of all byways in Braintree District from October to April with no consultation and the LAF wrote a comprehensive letter formally objecting. Now only 5 Byways across the County are subject to a temporary closure order from November to March

**Exmoor LAF** is helping to monitor delivery of the Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan 2012-17. In particular, the LAF has strategic responsibility for Priority B2 of the Partnership Plan: *Maintain high quality rights of way, services and facilities to enable people to explore and experience the special qualities of the National Park.*

**JLAF** (Joint Local Access Forum for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire) continued to work with the Ramblers Association to finance and staff a team of volunteers to maintain rights of way. The JLAF also participated in a working group to develop the Walkers Are Welcome initiative in the area. The respective local authorities feel that the JLAF have made a positive contribution to outdoor access in the area and can see a great deal of potential with the Walkers Are Welcome schemes being established by local communities in partnership with the JLAF.

**Leicestershire LAF** created a sub group to investigate the opportunities to create new Public Rights of Way to improve the existing network. The sub group examined plans of farmland due for tenancy renewal during the following year, and formulated recommendations to discuss with the County Council Operational Real Estate Manager. The outcome of these discussions included the dedication of a public footpath, joint investigation into a route suitable for people with disabilities and families with pushchairs and highlighted other routes that may be useful that could be negotiated prior to other tenancies being renewed.

**Mid-Lincolnshire LAF and South Lincolnshire & Rutland LAF** created a sub-group to investigate how to provide more opportunities for disabled people to enjoy the countryside. The sub group:

- Invited, listened to and has worked with a range of disability groups to identify issues which created barriers to accessing the countryside;

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

- Jointly with the disability groups, agreed that the Countryside For All format previously used by Lincolnshire County Council provided the best solution;
- Received training from Lincolnshire County Council in creating route information;
- Audited and surveyed individual routes;
- Assisted Lincolnshire and Rutland County Council in the design of the route literature.

Four route leaflets have been produced to download from the council website or pick up from centres. The number of routes will grow annually bringing benefits to people with disabilities as well as young families with pushchairs and others who wish to enjoy the countryside.

**Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum** focused on advising Oxfordshire County Council on preparing their second ROWIP (called the Rights of Way Management Plan), including examining national and local user research, understanding the use and demands on the network, and considering the management and maintenance by the County Council and others. A workshop enabled LAF members to scrutinise and contribute to the emerging ROWIP2 prior to the 12 week statutory consultation in January. Members highlighted the need to provide better access for people with disabilities and more provision for cyclists. The LAF also considered the responses to the consultation and the changes proposed in response before the ROWIP was adopted. Members praised highway authority officers for the production of a very comprehensive response and actions document which showed how each comment was considered by the authority and how the final ROWIP2 would change as a result. Once ROWIP2 is adopted LAF members will be fully involved in working with the authority to prepare their bi-annual rights of way business/delivery plan.

**Peak District LAF** attended a cycling summit, which was an opportunity to meet with individuals across the National Park and its environs to agree on priorities for a co-ordinated system of cycle routes for the wider Peak District. To assist with the development of the funding bid for this substantial project, the Peak District LAF contacted the 6 LAFs in the surrounding areas to ask them to offer their support. All the LAFs sent letters supporting the approach and fundraising bid. The partnership bid was successful and work is now taking place on the key link routes and a funding scheme for cycle hubs.

The LAF had been calling for a Cycling Strategy for the Peak District for some time. The above project means that the strategy has now been developed and approved by the National Park Authority. The LAF pressed for the inclusion of mountain biking within the strategy, and this advice is in the action plan. The LAF will be represented on the resulting mountain-biking focus group.

The LAF members also contributed to Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service Volunteer Policy which was developed during the year. The Council sought advice from both this LAF and the Derby & Derbyshire LAF at their meetings. Both responded with specific suggestions and much of the advice has appeared in the policy published on the County Council's website.

The LAF responded to consultations on potential traffic regulation orders on routes in the National Park. The LAF has also been working with officers of the National Park Authority and Highway Authorities over a number of years to identify actions to improve the management of Green Lanes in the National Park, and to advise on the implementation of these actions.

**Rotherham LAF** prepared a paper aimed at encouraging farmers and landowners to become LAF members and have recruited additional members including landowners and disability access representatives. They also had meetings with MPs, Area Assembly councillors, and senior managers in key related organisations to encourage greater awareness of the LAF's role. The LAF allocated £1,500 to improve Public Rights of Way and agreed a priority weighting matrix to advise the access

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

authority on its approach to the review of its Definitive Map. They advised the authority on a number of access improvement proposals in country parks and woodlands including extensions to existing multi-user trails.

**South Downs LAF** was instrumental in shaping some key behaviour change messages for dog walkers in a farmed landscape and is now acting as a 'critical friend' on the South Downs Way National Trail Partnership. During the year the LAF tackled significant local rights of way issues including diversion of a footpath proposed by Network Rail and improvements to access along a missing section of otherwise accessible coast. The LAF also supported and advised on improvements to a dangerous road crossing on the Downs Link and on a new multi-user path linking Brighton with the National Park.

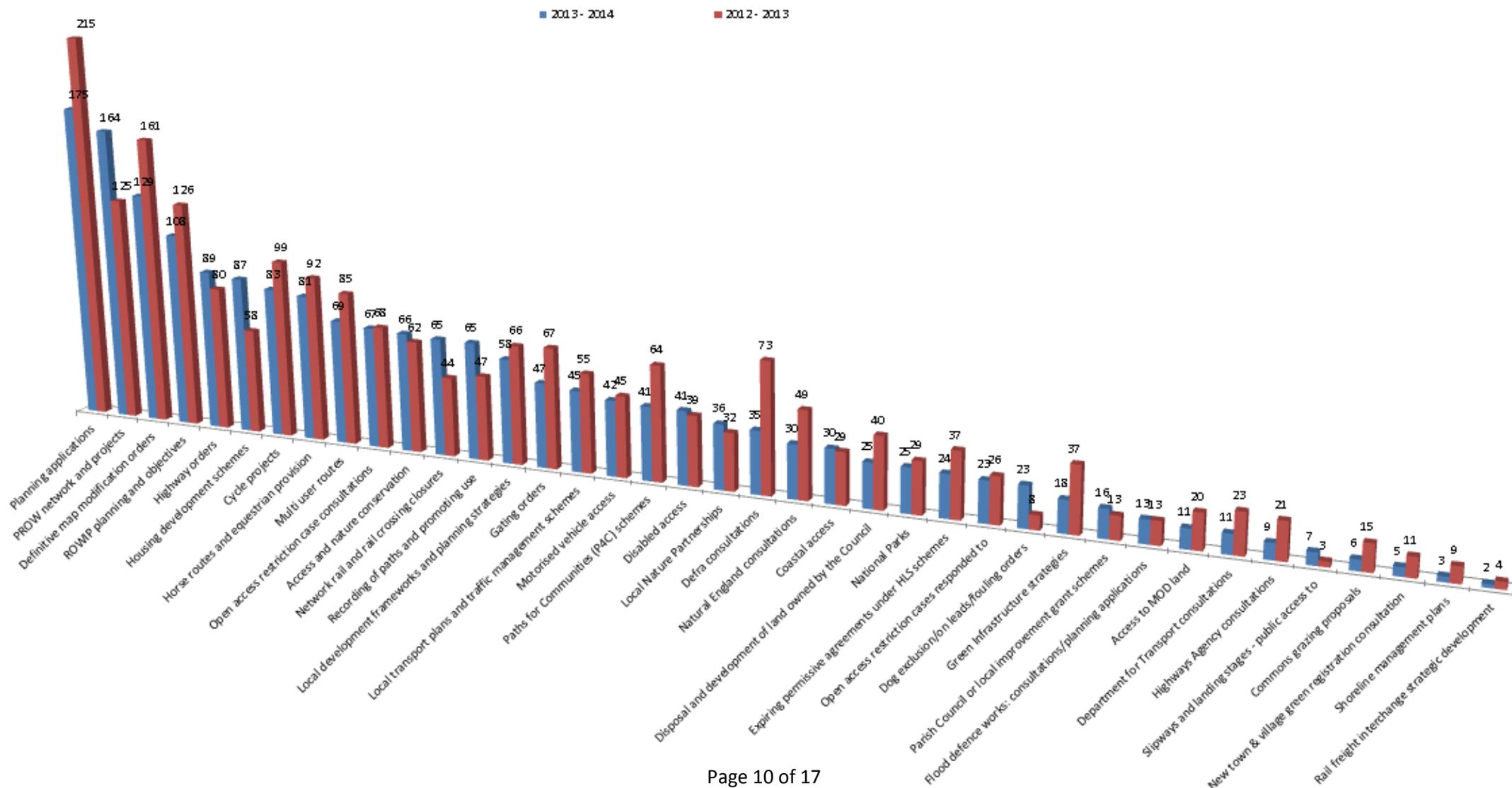
**Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum** continued to provide financial support to practical, 'grassroots' access improvements through the annual Paths Improvement Grant Scheme (PIGS) operated in conjunction with Wiltshire Council. Match funding was provided to nine PIGS projects across the county ranging from surface and furniture improvements to permissive routes to link up the rights of way network. Through the scheme, forum representatives were able to offer advice on how individual projects might be improved and developed to add further value to the network. The PIGS scheme will run again this year and has already attracted a number of strong applications from Parish Councils. The scheme is attracting other sources of community funding to invest in the Public Rights of Way network.

One PIGS initiative is to replace stiles with gates on a substantial scale throughout the Southern Area district. To date 60 kissing gates have been installed

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

### 3.2 Consultations and partnerships (comparing 2014 and 2013)

NB The chart and statistics below were produced using the data provided by the 82% of LAFs who submitted Annual Review Forms and shows the large number and variety of LAF activity during the year.



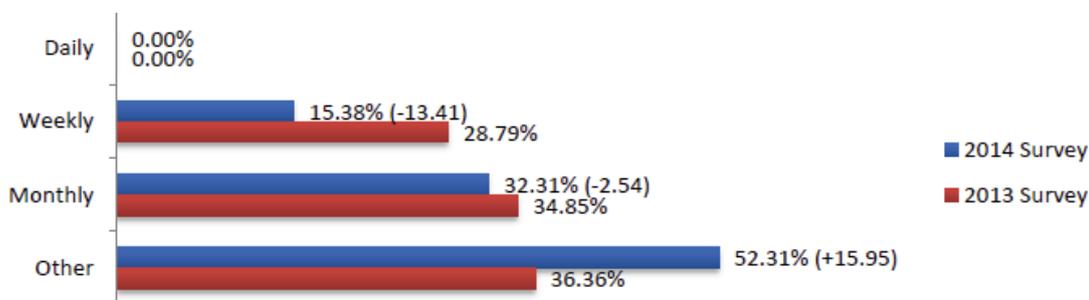
# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

## 4. LAF communications and events

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

The LAF workspace on Huddle was set up and managed by Natural England to help LAFs to work together and share good practice, as well as to facilitate communication with Natural England and Defra. The annual survey of LAF Chairs and Secretaries confirmed that Huddle continues to provide an important mechanism for supporting the LAFs. Throughout the year the number of LAF members using Huddle increased to 280 (244 reported last year) with 98% (95% last year) of LAFs represented. On average each LAF had 3 representatives using the LAF Huddle workspace.

Most respondents rated Huddle's ease of use as being very good to satisfactory (72%) although there was a 10% movement down from very good to very poor. LAF Chairs and Secretaries reported that they mainly accessed Huddle monthly (32%) with 15% checking the site weekly and 52% less than monthly or never.



Most (42%) feed information from Huddle to their LAF at meetings. There was a 16% drop from last year's results in confidence to join in on Huddle discussions and also a 13% drop in confidence to upload files or amend whiteboards. However, the individual sections on Huddle were mostly rated very good to satisfactory.

During 2013 Natural England provided guidance and information on Huddle covering a series of topics. The aim was to update the guidance currently in the LAF Handbook and to prompt discussion about examples of good practice. These Best Practice Guides were mostly rated very good to satisfactory (79%). In response to feedback from the annual survey Natural England will produce the guides as PDF documents, as well as content on Huddle, for email circulation to non-Huddle LAF members.

The results of the survey indicate that although the Huddle workspace is increasingly used by LAF members who are feeding information from Huddle to their LAFs, more work needs to be done to improve the confidence of users to make best use of the facility.

### 4.2 LAF conference

Natural England organised a national LAF conference for 2014. In order to keep travel costs to a minimum, two conferences were arranged in Bristol and Durham on 4th February 2014 and 7th March 2014 respectively. Three quarters of LAFs were represented with 111 delegates in total attending both conferences.

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

The conference programme was based on topics suggested by LAF members, with a range of speakers and workshop facilitators from the LAFs, Defra, Natural England and other organisations with an interest in public access. The presentations included:

- an update from Defra on the Deregulation Bill and how this is likely to impact on the recording of Public Rights of Way.
- briefings from two of the main lottery funding bodies, providing information on how LAFs can access lottery grants.
- presentations by National Rail on rail crossings, the Ramblers, the CLA and the NFU.
- workshops on Local Enterprise Partnerships, dogs in the countryside, access for all and LAF effectiveness.

The lively discussions within workshops and informally in the margins of the conferences, along with positive feedback from delegates, clearly demonstrated that the events were worthwhile and appreciated. Feedback from those attending revealed that whilst 100% said the content met with their objectives, overall satisfaction with the organisation and logistics was slightly lower than the previous year. One local authority commented that the conference was extremely valuable to LAF members adding, "We value the publication of the national conference proceedings, and the national report on Local Access Forums prepared by Natural England, as these help to keep secretaries/appointing authorities in the wider picture."

Materials from the conference, including workshop notes and feedback from delegates, are available to download from the LAF Huddle Workspace and the LAF page on gov.uk.

### ***4.3 LAF Newsletter***

During 2012/13 Natural England produced a new quarterly newsletter (LAF News) and issued three editions. This was in response to feedback received from LAFs that they would value more regular direct communication from Natural England. The newsletters included articles on Paths for Communities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, information from the conferences, examples of LAF good practice and details about Natural England staff whose work involves LAFs.

## **5. Engagement with other bodies**

LAFs have been encouraged to develop wider partnerships with Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWB). Working with other local partnerships was a theme of a workshop at the 2014 LAF and efforts have continued beyond that reported in this report. Results from the LAF survey showed that roughly half (51%) of the survey respondents reported that their LAF had written to their LNP with 43% reporting a follow-up meeting and only 5% stating that they had worked on a joint project with an LNP. Just 13% reported that their LAF had had written communication or a meeting with a LEADER LAG and only 5% reported any joint working with them.

Written communication with LEPs was reported to be higher (17%) than with LEADER groups though only 5% reported any meetings and only 2% reported joint working with LEPs.

Roughly a quarter (27%) of LAFs had engaged with Health and Wellbeing boards through written communication, 20% reported meetings and 12% reported joint working.

# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

## 6. Links with Natural England

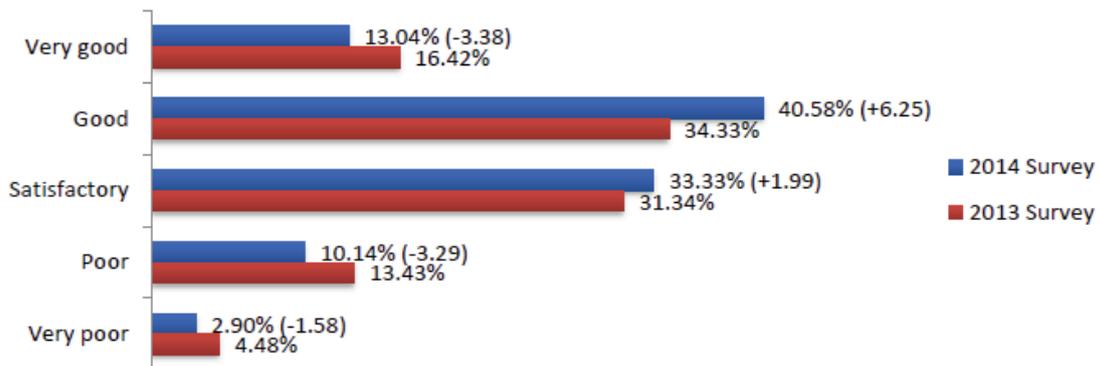
The vast majority of the LAF survey respondents reported that they knew their local Natural England contact (93% - an increase of 4% from last year's survey)



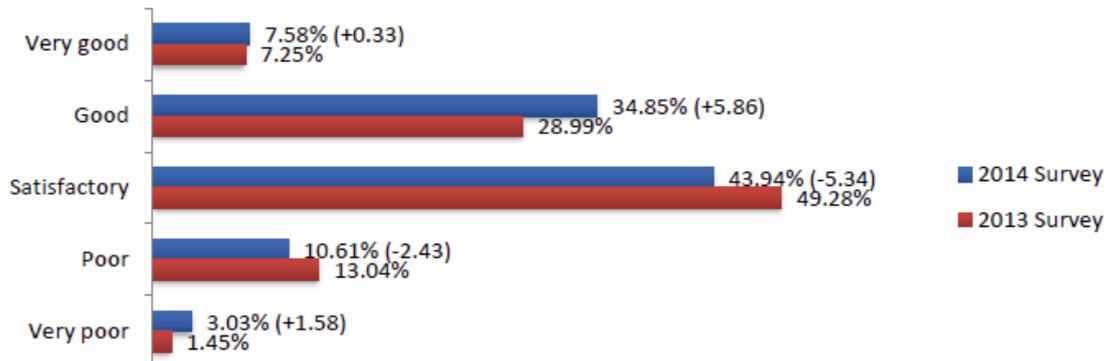
and just over half of respondents (54%) were satisfied with the ease of access to Natural England with 8% dissatisfied.

The majority of respondents said that both the local and national support they received from Natural England was very good to satisfactory (87%/86% respectively):

### Local Support



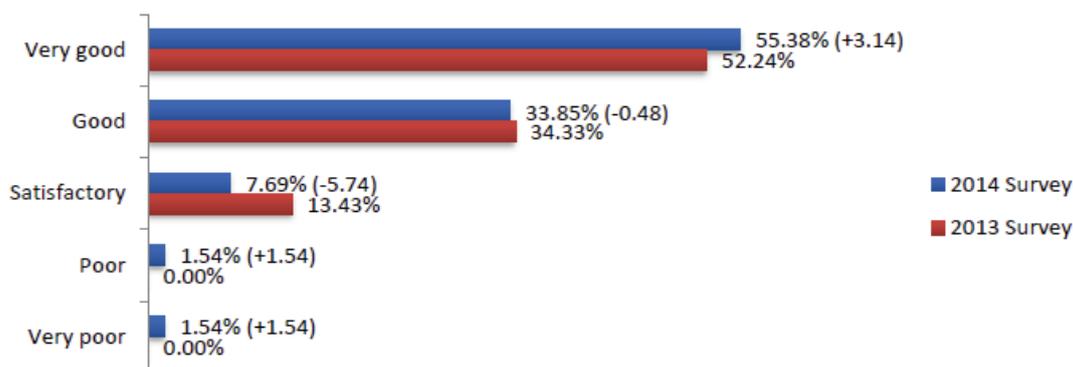
### National Support



Suggestions to improve this support included that Natural England should improve communication with LAFs, develop mechanisms for raising awareness of consultations and produce more guidance and information on who does what in all relevant Natural England teams.

The work of the Regional Coordinators was rated very similar to last year's survey with the vast majority (97%) saying that the support they received was very good to satisfactory.

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014



A suggestion to improve the regional support for LAFs was that the Regional Coordinators organise LAF Secretaries meetings in addition to regional Chairs meetings and conferences.

## 7. Advice and guidance

The majority of LAF Chairs and Secretaries were aware of the Defra guidance (97%, up 12% on last year's survey results) and use it (89%, up 19%). Most (59%) reported that they feel it doesn't need to be revised but a significant 41% say it does need to be revised to reflect:

- How sub-groups operate;
- How members vote;
- More clarity on budgets and on the level of support from local authorities;
- Changes in policy and legislation.

The majority (88%) know of the LAF handbook, though down 6% from last year's survey results and most (57%) use it.

The number of LAFs receiving training by their local authority remains low at 40% which is similar to the previous year's survey results. The training was rated mainly good to satisfactory. The results also show that most appointing authorities (78%) paid for a LAF member to attend the national LAF conference. The majority (76%) responded to say that Natural England should organise more face to face training for LAFs with most (81%) suggesting that the Regional Coordinators could run it if appropriate. The type of training required ranged from details on Public Rights of Way legislation and the List of Streets, to lots of suggestions for training in running an effective LAF, recruiting members and working with Councillors.

## 8. Reporting process

The clarity and ease of use of the annual reporting guidance and Annual Review Form produced by Natural England was rated at very good to satisfactory by 95% of respondents to the LAF survey and most (78%) saw the benefit in using the Annual Review Form, an 18% increase from last year. Most (91%) rated the annual reporting process overall to be very good to satisfactory. Respondents suggested that Natural England should continue to develop and improve the Annual Review Form in consultation with the Regional Coordinators and the LAFs.

# National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

## 9. Issues and challenges identified by LAFs

The Annual Review Form provided LAFs with an opportunity to list some of the challenges they have faced over the year along with their suggestions and ideas to help with these in the future.

The challenges faced included:

- Problems in recruiting, being quorate and retaining sufficient members and members that represent a diverse range of interests. Some LAFs had addressed this by raising the profile of their work and running recruitment campaigns to attract new members;
- 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 understanding and awareness of the role of LAFs with the Appointing Authority, planners and generally;
- Difficulties in responding to planning consultations due to lack of notification and insufficient time for LAFs to respond;
- Consultation formats increasingly do not allow for collective sharing of initial responses prior to sending;
- Lack of clarity about terms of reference and meeting protocol;
- Poor attendance from local authority staff, elected members and LAF members;
- Difficulties creating and developing successful partnerships (e.g. with Local Enterprise Partnerships/Local Nature Partnerships/Health and Wellbeing Boards);
- Working practices restricted by those adopted by democratic/committee services which reduce the flexibility of LAFs to operate in a more independent manner;
- The complexity of the P4C application process resulting in limited take up in some areas;
- Geographic size of the area has led to discussions by email, and those issues not included on formal agenda;
- Meeting times insufficient in order to achieve the work programme.

Opportunities and suggestions included:

- More guidance and evidence from central government on the inherent value of access to well-being, would strengthen the arguments to support public access and the role of LAFs;
- More visible support from Natural England to help reinforce the role of LAFs on Health Boards would be welcome;

## National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014

- Request that Natural England monitor consultations and ensure questionnaires are in a format that would allow sharing of drafts prior to submission from a LAF.

Natural England and Defra are responding to these issues where possible, for example by continuing the production and circulation of the 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.

### 10. Appointing authority feedback

Despite the many issues and challenges faced by the LAFs over the year, particularly regarding frustration due to diminishing local authority resources, many of the LAF appointing authorities had positive comments to make about their work.

Many local authorities acknowledged the commitment of LAF members despite ongoing staff changes and budget reductions in many appointing authorities. There was high praise for the work of the LAFs and the commitment and passion of the members. Their continued support, time and effort was valued.

Several authorities welcomed the clear, independent and considered advice received by LAFs with some recognising that this work is something the authority would be unable to do itself. Having an independent viewpoint on access proved to be of great assistance, particularly when dealing with developers. A number of excellent enhancements had resulted from the LAFs working with developers and officers.

The experience and advice given by forums was highly valued along with the enthusiasm and determination to deliver results and secure achievements. LAFs were a welcome consultee, especially on ROWIPs and other strategies which could deliver or impact on access. The LAF was described by one authority as an “invaluable critical friend”. Another authority said LAF’s worked well as a team and were not afraid to challenge authority.

Some authorities commented on the skills, knowledge and diplomacy within LAFs to successfully resolve local issues. The dedicated, constructive way the LAFs tackled important themes or topics was noted along with the initiative many LAFs took to put forward suggestions and to organise their own pro-active work programmes. One authority specifically commended the LAF involvement with the Local Nature Partnership and with health issues.

In addition some authorities noted that many LAF members had increased their involvement in Public Rights of Way work outside of meetings including volunteer days and organising meetings with their user groups on specific issues to develop and support the Public Rights of Way team. One authority added that the benefits and cost savings being achieved by LAFs continue to play an important role in service delivery.

The Appointing Authorities also noted some challenges and difficulties in working with LAFs and in particular the difficulties in combining the various views present into clear and coherent advice.

Feedback from the Appointing Authorities included ideas and suggestions for actions that could help develop and improve LAFs and the work they do. They noted the importance of continuing to raise

## **National LAF Report - April 2013 to March 2014**

the profile of LAFs at all levels and with a wide range of organisations. Many of the suggestions focused on streamlining and prioritising work areas to reduce agenda size and the volume of meeting papers, as well as ordering the business dealt with at the meetings so that important matters were dealt with first. One authority suggested that it would be useful for the secretaries of LAFs to network to help develop the effectiveness of the LAFs.