

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via Zoom</b>

		<b>Paper Number</b>
1.	14:00 Welcome, apologies and housekeeping	
2.	14:05 Minutes of previous meeting	<b>LAF 20/18 - BH</b>
3.	14:10 Declaration of interest	
4.	14:10 Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garden Villages Consultation</li> <li>• Local Planning Authority Planners Presentation 'Building Well Connected Communities'</li> </ul>	<b>LAF 21/01 – DF</b>
5.	14:20 Suffolk Energy Schemes	<b>LAF 21/02 – AW</b>
6.	14:35 Trunk Road Update	<b>Verbal – DF / AW</b>
7.	14:45 The England Coast Path	<b>LAF 21/03 – AW</b>
8.	14:55 Network Rail – Public Rights of Way Level Crossings	<b>LAF 21/04 – AW</b>
9.	15:15 Regional LAF Forum	<b>Verbal – BH / DB</b>
10.	15:20 Discovering Suffolk Project	<b>Verbal – DF</b>
11.	15:30 Correspondence	<b>LAF 21/05 – DF</b>
12.	15:35 Public Question Time	
13.	15:55 Any Other Business	
14.	16:00 Dates & Venues of Future Meetings	

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Minutes of Meeting</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>29<sup>th</sup> October 2020 2-4.30pm</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Anna McGowan</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via TEAMS</b>

### 1. Welcome, apologies and housekeeping

Present: Barry Hall (BH) (Chair), David Barker (DB) (Vice Chair), Cllr Jane Storey (JS), Monica Pipe (MP), Susan Mobbs (SM), Roland Wilson (RW), Anthony Wright (AWR), Margaret Hancock (MH), Clare Phillips (CP), Cllr James Mallinder (JM)

**SCC Officers Present:** Anna McGowan (Minutes), Andrew Woodin (AW), David Falk (DF)

**Apologies:** Jane Hatton (JH), Gordon Merfield (GM), Derek Blake (DBL), John Wayman (JW), Suzanne Bartlett (SB)

**Members of the Public:** Ken Hawkins (KH)

### 2. Minutes of previous meeting (LAF20/11)

The minutes of the online meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020 were reviewed and agreed.

### 3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

### 4. Network Rail Public Rights of Way Level Crossings

AW stated that there is nothing further to update.

CP said she has got a letter from the Department of Transport in response to Brantham Parish Council's letter to their MP – James Cartlidge. The Parish Council had asked what is happening with the TWAO. The letter noted the Secretary of State has had the inspector's report since March 2020 and is considering the matter. No date was given for a decision. [Subsequently the Cambridgeshire order was confirmed with modifications, including not to close some level crossings.]

**Action: - CP to send AM the letter from the Department of Transport  
AM to forward the letter to all SLAF members**

### 5. England Coast Path

AW said remaining 2 stretches' reports are awaited and will be published as follows:

Bawdsey to Aldeburgh – January 2021

Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey – this year.

BH said that it is good that NE are taking the estuary seriously, noting that a foot ferry had sunk.

The latest reports will be subject to consultation, which the SLAF working group will be able to consider.

## **6. Sizewell C, and Friston Sub Station**

AW gave a verbal update. SCC have submitted representations to the Planning Inspectorate including concerns about green access and PROW, together with a Statement of Common Ground. The Planning Inspectorate will see the areas of disagreement.

There will be another 30-day consultation in November.

**Action: BH to look into this with the SZC Working Group**

### **Letter to the Planning Inspectorate**

BH said that the responses to all the previous consultations were included in the letter, which also pointed out that EDF had ignored all of SLAF's requests.

### **Friston Sub Station**

AW gave updates on East Anglia 1 and North East Anglia 2 proposals.

DB noted that the new Bridleways proposed in EA1 might be difficult to achieve.

## **7. Sunnica Energy Farm**

AW said this 3<sup>rd</sup> major energy scheme proposed in Suffolk is in the west of the county.

This will cover an enormous area with solar farm sites. It is out for consultation from 1<sup>st</sup> September – 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

DB expressed an interest and considers that access should be left better than before. DB may speak to Claire Dickson.

It was agreed that alternative routes would be needed during the construction period. BH said that he has emailed the CLAF Chair who will add this to their Forum's agenda.

JM joined the online meeting at 2.42pm.

JS said that the PROWs to be 'cut off' need to be looked at.

MH said that there were no maps available for the 3 permissive footpaths during the webinars.

AWR said that the fencing may be a problem, as it needs to be sensitive to the environment leaving boundaries.

MP said that further wider access improvements need to be sought.

**Action:** The one off Working Group comprising DB and JS to respond to the consultation.

## **8. A14 Severance**

AW updated on his meeting with Highways England (HE) regarding improving access over the A14. The county council's Transport Strategy Team are liaising with HE, and working with PROW Team.

The transport team have produced a preliminary desk top study regarding the severance to identify priority targets for further investment. It is taking the community severance approach, rationalising the PROW network in 7 locations: Felixstowe, Stowupland, Coddendam, Sproughton, Needham Market, Bramford and Ipswich, This study is not in the public domain and a response is awaited from HE.

BH said that this look encouraging and in essence the Stowupland to Felixstowe stretch of the A14 is covered.

AWR remarked that the west of the A14 to Cambridgeshire is not.

CP asked about the Wherstead reorganisation of the A137, if there is any funding from this reorganisation, as there are Bridleways and footpaths there.

AW said that HE have funds to improve communities, walking and cycling which need to be tapped in to, but these have not been allocated for this year yet.

AWR said there is a need to fix current problems, adding that there are several dangerous crossings on the A14, and asked if these were included in the Transport Team's study.

AW said it was important to concentrate on priority sites eg. Towns etc.

DB said this looks positive as diversions will provided using existing crossings.

JS said to look to the easier and more constructive proposals first – to let sleeping dogs lie, where PROW are, and are likely to be, little used.

Members were encouraged by this development and interested in receiving further updates.

## 9. OA seasonal closure Euston, The Brecks

DF gave a verbal update on this matter after Agenda Item no. 13, when members of the Public were asked to leave the meeting.

## 10. SLAF Annual Report 2019-2020

This was present to Cabinet held online on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

DF said that Cllr Andrew Reid was putting lots of money into bridges ie. £1m.

DF updated that the Cabinet gave the SLAF Annual Report a lot of interest, that is was a meaty subject which lasted over one hour long. The Cabinet's focus was very constructive and Councillors asked further questions about Network Rail, Trunk Road Severance, PROW investment, the representation of people with disabilities on the Forum, and the need for more robust SCC responses to SLAF.

CP noted that her work for riding with the disabled included wider usage groups with disabilities.

## 11. Review of Working Groups

Topic	Membership
PRoW Severance, including Network Rail and Highways England	Barry Hall, Roley Wilson, Clare Philips
Sizewell C	Barry Hall, Anthony Wright, Roley Wilson, Suzanne Bartlett
Open Access	Barry Hall, Gordon Merfield,
Coastal Erosion and Access	Barry Hall, Roley Wilson, Susan Mobbs

Planning and Development	Jane Storey, Jane Hatton, Anthony Wright, Roley Wilson
Agri-Environment Access Schemes	David Barker, John Wayman

## 12. Public Question Time

KH's proposal to the BLAF to make changes to encourage co-ordination and communication NLAf has been agreed and BLAF will make changes to their constitution to encourage that liaison, and to invite a member of NLAf to attend their meetings with all the rights of a full member, apart from not having a vote. NLAf is thus reviewing its own constitution

KH proposed to these mirror clauses in that, extending to both BLAF and SLAF- inviting SLAF to consider like arrangements.

KH said that this would enhance discussions on topics of issue such as Trunkroad Severance; the joint promotion of the ECC/NCC; encourage closer co-operation between BLAF/NLAf/SLAF.

BH suggested that Agendas could be shared with each of the groups, otherwise this proposal would require further discussion.

AW said that regional LAF meetings already focus on common interests, like trunk road severance.

## 13. Any Other Business

There was a discussion on planning/awareness raising and when to alert SLAF to bring about.

AWR asked why SLAF are not informed about large planning applications.

AW responded that SLAF are not one of the local planning authorities consultees, and said it was up to SCC Officers to inform SLAF of any areas of interest regarding planning.

AW said SCC Officers have limited capacity to assist SLAF, if SLAF want to get into the detail of planning applications, but can share SCC thoughts on proposals being considered. AW offered for the ROW & Access team to decide a scale of development large enough to fulfil SLAF's remit to consider more strategic green access matters, for example proposals of over 500 dwellings.

JM suggested a mailshot to Parish Councils/Town Councils to look out for PROW.

MP reminded the Forum that SCC Officers are already dealing with applications and that SLAF needs to concentrate on big issues.

RW agreed that SLAF should keep it at the strategic level and said that the Ramblers Association look at all consultations affecting PROW.

**Action: DF/AW to consider alerts to SLAF of large sites.**

**DF to invite planning authorities MSC/BDC and WSC to make their presentations to forthcoming SLAF Meetings.**

JM said he would like to circulate East Suffolk Council's request for ideas on improving walking and cycling in the area in their consultation.

**Action: JM to circulate the link to AM  
AM to forward to all SLAF members.**

David Barker said he will get in touch with Lord Gardiner again about the progress of the Agriculture Bill and public access provisions

**14. Dates of Future Meetings**

**28<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**29<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

**29<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

**28<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

END AMG/SCC October 2020

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Planning</b>
<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>David Falk</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via Zoom</b>

### **Garden Village Consultations**

#### South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood Masterplan Consultation

The adopted Suffolk Coastal Local Plan allocates land to the south of Saxmundham for a garden neighbourhood comprising primary school and early years provision, community facilities, employment and open space alongside 800 new homes. The Site lies to the south of the town and is bisected by the A12 and East Suffolk Line railway.

A consultation to share your thoughts on how a high-quality landscape-led sustainable neighbourhood can be brought forward is now open. The consultation is open until Sunday 31 January 2021.

The consultation website is <https://saxmundhamsouth.co.uk/>

#### Land North of Lowestoft (Corton)

A virtual exhibition about the preparation of a Masterplan for the North of Lowestoft Garden Village is available at <https://www.northoflowestoft.co.uk/>

This consultation is now open and runs until 5pm on 15 February 2021.

A virtual exhibition has been prepared Suffolk County Council Corporate Property Division in consultation with East Suffolk District Council. At this stage of the consultation, the background, context, issues and potential options that will be explored through the Masterplan process are being highlighted. A series of presentation boards provide a summary of the information being consulted on and respondents are asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of a presentation on the website.

Feedback will be considered to work up a preferred options Masterplan document. The next stage of consultation will be in the Summer of 2021. A Masterplan will then be submitted to East Suffolk District Council for approval in the Autumn of 2021.

## Land West of Mildenhall

A virtual exhibition on a Masterplan for 'Land West of Mildenhall' is available at <https://www.westofmildenhall.co.uk/>

This consultation is now live and runs until 5pm on 15 February 2021.

A virtual exhibition has been prepared by Suffolk County Council as the main landowner and promoter of this Masterplan area, in consultation with West Suffolk Council. At this stage of the consultation, the background, context, issues and potential options that will be explored through the Masterplan process are highlighted. A series of presentation boards provide a summary of the information being consulted on and respondents are encouraged to complete a questionnaire at the end of the presentation.

Feedback from this consultation will be considered when working up the preferred options Masterplan document. The next stage of consultation will be in the Summer of 2021 with a Masterplan submitted to West Suffolk Council for approval or adoption in the Autumn of 2021.

## **Local Planning Authority Planners Presentation 'Building Well Connected Communities'**

Suffolk Growth Partnership are facilitating 2 90-minute training sessions led by David Falk, Green Access Manager at Suffolk County Council, and Ben Woolnough, Major Sites and Infrastructure Manager at East Suffolk Council.

The online training sessions are aimed at Suffolk Local Planning Authority and colleagues to gain a better understanding of what the Suffolk Green Access Strategy is and how to achieve well connected communities. The training will demonstrate what the strategy means for planning and inform on the opportunities and challenges of delivering connections and illustrate how green access benefits communities.

The first 2-hour training session was provided on Tuesday 19 January and was attended by 47 planners, local authority staff and members of the Suffolk Local Access Forum.

A second session will be on Thursday 11 February at 10am. To register please visit <https://www.suffolkgrowth.co.uk/events>

END – DF/SCC January 2021



<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Suffolk Energy Schemes</b>
<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via Zoom</b>

1. **Sunnica**
2. **Sizewell C**
3. **Scottish Power EA1N & EA2 and Friston substation**

#### 1. **Sunnica**

Members have received previous updates on the proposals for a large solar farm spanning the Suffolk/Cambridgeshire border, between Mildenhall and Newmarket.

The statutory consultation for the proposal took place between 22 September 2020 and 2 December 2020. Following the statutory consultation, Sunnica Limited will have regard to the comments received and continue to develop its design for the proposed Sunnica Energy Farm ahead of submitting a development consent order application to the Secretary of State.

County council officers supported the forum in preparing its response, which is attached at appendix 1.

#### 2. **Sizewell C**

Sizewell is proceeding to the start of Examination, likely in late February/early March. Discussions are ongoing on finalising technical aspects of the proposals such as the description and mapping of PROW that will be temporarily stopped up. EDF submitted a further consultation in November outlining changes mainly to how materials will get to and from the site.

The county council continues to raise concerns regarding:

- the disruption of the public footpath and ECP along the beach,
- its future proposed position on the sacrificial sea defence,
- the inadequacy of the alternative coastal footpath,
- a plethora of technical and legal matters that affect the 26 PROW on the main site, the Sizewell Link Road, the Two Village bypass and at rail crossings on the branch line and green rail route.

There are also workstreams looking at s106 obligations. The county council is developing proposals for mitigating the impact on PRow and access directly affected by the proposals (physical works, signing, information ideas) and a proposal for a long distance multi user trail as mitigation for the impact of the development on the tourism industry.

The Sizewell November 30 day consultation was on proposed changes to the Sizewell C application for the Development Consent Order, with a particular focus on proposals to move more freight to marine and rail-based transport modes. The county council's joint response, along with more background on Sizewell C, can be found [here](#).

SLAF's response is included as appendix 2.

### **3. Scottish Power EA1N & EA2 and Friston substation**

Scottish Power submitted their Development Consent Order in November 2019. It involves a cable route from the coast that will affect 26 PRow's during construction and three substations that will require the permanent stopping up of a section of PRow to the north of the village of Friston.

The county council has raised concerns about the inadequacy of the methodology and conclusions of the Environmental Impact Assessment, as it does not measure or address the impact of the development on the amenity and the quality of the user experience of the PRow network. The team has also tried to influence the outcome for the footpath that will be stopped up because of the substations. The county council is now part way through the Examination Stage and this involves answering questions posed by the Inspectors, commenting on SPR responses and representing the County Council at the online Examination Hearings. The county council also submitted ideas for improving access using funding proposed to be provided by SPR under a S111 agreement (Local Government Act). Those ideas have been well received by SPR and ESDC -see cabinet report [Document.ashx \(cmis.uk.com\)](#).

END – AW/SCC January 2021

#### Appendix 1



Sunnica SLAF  
Response 15.12.20.1

#### Appendix 2



SLAF Comments on  
Further Consultation

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>The England Coast Path</b>
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via Zoom</b>

### 1. Progress on Establishing The England Coast Path (ECP)

Reports for four of the five stretches of coastal access in Suffolk have been published, on the dates stated.

Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry – 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020

Harwich to Shotley Gate – 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2020

Aldeburgh to Hopton on Sea – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2020

Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey – 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020

The latest information from Natural England's (NE) on its progress for the ECP in Suffolk and Norfolk is shown on their website. The website progress overview map was last updated on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<b>Stretch name</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<a href="#">Harwich to Shotley Gate</a>	Stage 4: Determine
<a href="#">Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry</a>	Stage 4: Determine
<a href="#">Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey</a>	Stage 4: Determine
<a href="#">Bawdsey to Aldeburgh</a>	Stage 2 and 3: Develop and Propose
<a href="#">Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea</a>	Stage 4: Determine
<a href="#">Hopton-on-Sea to Sea Palling</a>	Open to the public

The stages to establish Coastal Access are as follows:

#### **Stage 1: Prepare**

Initial preparations will begin for the implementation of a new stretch. Natural England will:

- define the extent of the stretch
- ask key organisations about their ideas or concerns about the stretch
- consider the current public access use and the options for the route

#### **Stage 2: Develop**

At this stage, Natural England will:

- speak with local landowners and other legal interests on land that may be affected to:
  - ask for views on where they think the route should go
  - offer to ‘walk the course’ and explain initial ideas
  - discuss any local issues that might need to be addressed
- speak with relevant organisations to make sure that any important sensitive features are protected

### **Stage 3: Propose**

Natural England will finalise proposals for the England Coast Path on this stretch and publish them in a report to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

### **Stage 4: Determine**

After the report has been published, there’s an opportunity to comment on the proposals. At this time:

- anyone who wishes to comment can make a representation on the report
- owners or occupiers can submit an objection relating to particular aspects of the proposals

See the guidance about how to comment for more information.

Once the period to comment on the proposals has ended, the Secretary of State will decide whether to approve the proposals in Natural England’s report. When making a decision, any representations or objections that have been submitted will be considered along with the recommendations from the Planning Inspectorate.

### **Stage 5: Open**

The Secretary of State approves the route of the England Coast Path on this stretch.

Preparations are then made on the ground and the necessary legal paperwork is completed. Once complete, the new public rights of access will come into force on the stretch.

Further information on the England Coast Path can be found [here](#).

## **2. The Stretches in More Detail**

Natural England has provided the following updates around the Suffolk coast stretches. Expected publication dates have been highlighted in yellow, and this bunching may put county council officers under pressure when it comes to responding to the reports, and implementing the new routes once confirmed. The county council is working on its response to the Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey

stretch, due by 3<sup>rd</sup> February, and has offered to provide support to SLAF in forming their response.

It is not possible to say whether current Covid restrictions will delay progress on the stretches.

On 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 the county council was notified the Secretary of State decided to approve the proposals for the Shotley to Felixstowe Ferry stretch relating to sections SGF2, SGF4 and SGF5. His decision is outlined in the notice which is available [here](#).

The right of access to the approved stretch of coast does not come into effect at this stage. Natural England will be working with the county council to establish any infrastructure works before an Order is made by the Secretary of State under the 2009 Act to bring the rights into effect.

Work is progressing on the England Coast Path - a new National Trail around all of England's coast.

A European court judgement in April 2018 affected how Natural England should assess the impact of England Coast Path proposals on environmentally protected sites. Progress slowed as a result and having adjusted its approach to ensure compliance with this judgement.

The national impact of Coronavirus restrictions added a further complication. Offices were closed, staff resource and availability was reduced and site visits could not be undertaken during the peak summer months. This restriction also impacted the Planning Inspectorate who have had to delay their reviews of stretches and reports subject to Objections. However, Natural England continues to work hard to ensure as much of the England Coast Path as possible is open by 2020.

### **Suffolk Stretches**

**Harwich to Shotley Gate** – Kim Thirlby & Sally Fishwick. Last updated 04.1.21

- Stage 4 (Determine)
- The Overview, and the compendium of six separate reports (covering individual lengths of coast within the stretch) were published on 22 January 2020. The 8 week period for comment closed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020
- Natural England received 7 objections, to 5 of the 6 individual reports. As stretches are published as a compendium of reports, the absence of objection on 1 of the 6 reports means Natural England anticipates that this will progress positively to Secretary of State approval which would then allow Suffolk CC to undertake establishment works.
- Natural England are currently drafting their comments on the objections and representations received.

**Shotley Gate to Felixstowe Ferry** – Darren Braine. Last updated 05.01.21

- Stage 4 (Determine)
- Natural England published proposals on 15th January 2020 and the 8 week period for public comment ended on 11 March.
- Two objections were received. As stretches are published as a compendium of reports, the absence of objection on 3 of the 5 reports means Natural England expects these 3 reports to progress positively to Secretary of State approval which would then allow Suffolk CC to undertake establishment works. Natural England previously anticipated that this approval will be given before the end of 2020, but is now expected early 2021.
- The 2 reports with objections now wait for the Planning Inspectorate to review and report.

**Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey** – Giles Merritt & Sally Fishwick. Last updated 04.1.21

- Stage 4 (Determine)
- Natural England published proposals on 9th December 2020 and the 8 week period for public comment ends on 3 February 2021.

**Bawdsey to Aldeburgh** –Jonathan Clarke & Darren Braine. Last updated 15.10.20

- Stage 2 (Develop) and Stage 3 (Propose)
- Natural England has reviewed comments received on the initial planned alignment and are finalising proposals
- The HRA and NCA are in final draft stage.
- **Natural England expects to publish proposals in early February 2021.** (Staff resource availability and Christmas break coupled with the intensive process of publishing and mailing hundreds of owners has pushed this date into 2021.) They have kindly offered early sight of the route and options proposed:



Suffolk LAF.pdf

**Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea** – Sally Fishwick. Last updated 15.10.20

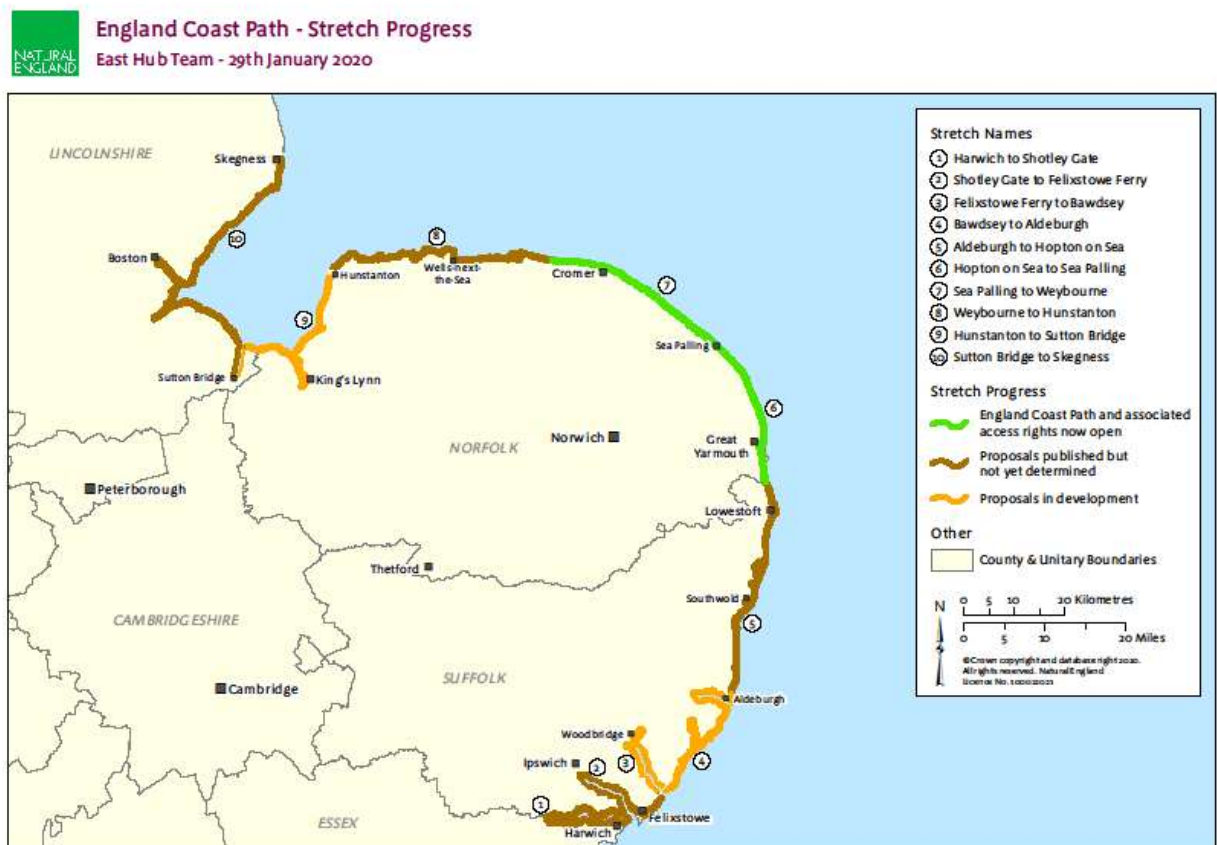
- Stage 4 (Determine)
- Natural England published proposals on 29th January 2020. The 8 week period for public comment, closed on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020.
- 23 objections were received, to 1 of the 6 individual reports. As stretches are published as a compendium of reports, the absence of objections on 5 of the 6 reports means Natural England expects these will progress positively to Secretary of State approval, which would then allow Suffolk CC to undertake establishment works.

It will be for the local access forum to prepare a response to the Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey report.

### 3. Future Management of the England Coast Path in the East of England

Discussions with Essex and Norfolk have been deferred due to the impact of Covid 19 on Natural England's and the councils' resources.

### 4. England Coast Path – Progress Map for the East



END – AW/SCC January 2021

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Network Rail – Public Rights of Way Level Crossings</b>
<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Steve Kerr / Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via Zoom</b>

### Introduction

This paper updates the Forum on the main level crossings being addressed by Network Rail (NR) and Suffolk County Council ('the Council' or 'SCC'), and progress on their Transport and Works Act proposals.



### Needham Market Gipsy Lane and FP6 Needham Market

Further to the update provided at the Forum's meeting on 29 October 2020, there has been no further progress in delivering the diversionary works and no agreement reached with the affected landowner.

The lack of progress was escalated by the Council's Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure to Network Rail's Anglia Route Director and on the 28 October 2020 a response was received, setting out the background to the case and advising that NR were continuing to work closely with the landowner to try and address their concerns.

Whilst it is for NR to negotiate and secure any outstanding agreements or consents, the Council continues to liaise with both parties.



## **Felixstowe Branch Line Improvements – Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO)**



SCC, in its capacity as the highway authority, is now responsible for the maintenance of the new routes, including the surfacing of the ramped brideway bridge. The Council is unaware of any protection/maintenance reports by the public regarding the diversionary alignments.

### **General/Countywide**

#### **NR's Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction Strategy - Transport and Works Act Order**

On the 26 November 2020 the Secretary of State for Transport finally issued his decision letter on the Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction Order. Out of an ultimate total of 22 crossings, 13 were removed from the order, including all 8 the county council had objected to.

The next step will be for SCC and Network Rail to work together to agree and implement the required works on those crossings the SoSfT has included in the Order. For ease of reference, you can see which particular level crossing proposals have been excluded/included on pages 25 and 26 of the decision letter.

Now that the 42 day High Court objection period has expired, the Order comes into force on 19 January 2021. There are two 'Day 1' level crossing proposals contained in the Order (S11 Leggetts – FP 12 Haughley/FP6 Old Newton with Dagworth and S12 Gooderhams - FP19 Bacton) and these footpaths will be extinguished on the above date. As part of the works, Network Rail will be removing the existing stiles at these two crossings and erecting advisory signing.

The remaining PROW level crossings will only be extinguished once all works required on the alternative routes have been satisfactorily completed and certified by the highway authority.

The DfT sent the attached covering letter and SoSfT decision letter to the SLAF inbox on 26/11/20 and this was forwarded on to the Chairman. For the benefit of all members, this correspondence is included below, together with the much more detailed Inspector's report, which extends to 341 pages.

In relation to the 8 proposals SCC objected to, the Inspector found that the requirements of section 5(6) of the TWA 1992 had not been met, such that the alternative route being provided by Network Rail was not a "convenient and suitable replacement for existing users". This result is considered a resounding success for both the Council and SLAF and recognises the thrust of its objections regarding the suitability of the proposed alternatives.

Two PRow included in the TWAO were already the subject of temporary closure on safety grounds – one at Higham and one at Brantham. The county council objected to their permanent closure and they were subsequently removed from the made order. At Higham, where the safety grounds cited in the temporary closure were in fact unrepaired steps down the embankment, the county council has instructed Network Rail to repair the steps and reopen the path, and at Brantham, where the safety grounds were sight lines, the county council is meeting Network Rail later this month to discuss the future of the crossing. The county council has advised Network Rail it is still prepared to consider diversion applications under Highways Act 1980 powers, where a suitable and convenient alternative route can be found for the PRow.



201126 L Cov Let  
OBJ 23.pdf



201126 FINAL  
LETTER.PDF



DPI V3500 17 13  
Suffolk\_.docx

### **Stiles on Network Rail Land**

In September the county council received a report of dangerous stile which had been erected on a PRow in Ufford by Network Rail. The Area ROW Manager investigated and there transpired to be four similar stiles in the area, and the photos below show the stile which prompted the report. The stile included a dog pass, which was very difficult to operate.



The county council escalated the matter with Network Rail and, after some toing and froing, a meeting took place earlier this month with the Network Rail Anglia Route Public and Passenger Health and Safety Manager, whose responsibilities include managing two local level crossing managers, to discuss Network Rail policy on lineside furniture on PRow and the four unsuitable stiles erected in Suffolk in the autumn.

The Network Rail manager advised public safety always come first, but conceded at least one of the crossings where existing stiles were replaced with the new stiles, the reason was not safety but because the Network Rail operative didn't think gates would fit in with the existing ground conditions. In respect of safety, the case the Network Rail manager appeared to be putting forward, perhaps inadvertently, was stiles deter "vulnerable users", eg those with mobility problems, from crossing the railway because they might take longer and increase the safety risk. The county council advised the manager that erecting barriers to deter access goes against every grain of its own approach, which is to improve access for vulnerable users.

The outcome of the meeting was the Network Rail manager agreed to both review the four stiles and whether they might be upgraded to gates, and would check Network Rail's own guidance on replacing furniture.

Outside of the local context, the ROW & Access Manager raised the matter with the regional Rights of Way Managers Group of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), of which he is a member. It transpired Suffolk is not the only county locally where Network Rail has erected similar stiles. The group is represented on Network Rail's national Level Crossing Strategy Group, where the topic of stile and gate design is under review under the direction of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). The ORR is accountable to Parliament and the public to protect the people who use, interact or work on the railway. At that point draft design guidance for level crossing managers was expected, this has just come in and can be found here:

<https://www.orr.gov.uk/search-consultations/consultation-new-orr-guidance-principles-level-crossing-safety>

All responses should be sent to [LevelCrossingPrinciples@orr.gov.uk](mailto:LevelCrossingPrinciples@orr.gov.uk) by 5pm on 26 February 2021. Members, including those on the road and rail severance working group, may wish to comment on improvements to line side PRow furniture.

END – SK/AW/SCC January 2021

<b>Suffolk Local Access Forum</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Correspondence</b>
<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>Author/Contact:</b>	<b>Andrew Woodin</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Online via Zoom</b>

The following correspondence was received into the SLAF email inbox.

Dear Councillor

I am writing to ask for your help with improving public rights of way as part of your response to the COVID pandemic.

As a result of lockdowns, my wife and I have been using footpaths around our village much more than previously. We have noticed that many more local people are using these paths for their mental and physical well-being. I am sure you must have noticed this yourself. I am also sure that you are aware of the lack of access to green and recreational space in rural areas.

While finding some paths are good, we have been disappointed to find others are unusable. We have encountered a path blocked with fencing, a landowner claiming that rights of way no longer exist, paths with unusable surfaces due to ploughing, missing and damaged signs. [I have reported some of these problems.] I would ideally like to undertake an audit of all the rights of way within our parish. However, on the basis of the number of problems found using just a few routes, I worry that this would generate so many problem reports that it could have resource implications for the Rights of Way team and distort priorities.

I have had a quick look at the Suffolk CC Green Access Strategy (Rights of Way Improvement Plan). This is an impressive and welcome document. I am pleased to read that it assesses the:

- extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public
- opportunities provided by local footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and byways for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation, and the enjoyment of the area
- accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

I would like to suggest that the pandemic necessitates a big change in thinking in relation to rights of way. I fear that it has highlighted rights of way as an under-resourced service unable to respond adequately to the new needs of people arising from the pandemic and its' consequences. Please could you help to push rights of way up the agenda and provide additional resources? For example, has the Council been given Covid-related funding by central government which could be directed towards improving rights of way?

Many thanks for your attention, and I look forward to your reply.

Best wishes

This was responded to as follows:

Dear Tim,

Further to your email, herewith my response as Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, including responsibility for Public Rights of Way (PRoW).

I welcome your comments on our Green Access Strategy. I am sorry to hear about the condition of some of your local PRoW but am not surprised some of the county's PRoW are in a poor state at the moment, due to the poor weather this winter. Thank you for reporting the problems, I trust you are using our reporting tool to do this, to ensure reports are properly monitored and sent to the right offices. Reports are prioritised as you might expect, and the importance of the PRoW and severity of the problem are taken into account. You are correct in assuming an audit of all the rights of way within Metfield is likely to add to the backlog of works.

You will be pleased to know the county council has invested significantly in PRoW capital maintenance over the last year and has been investing significant sums in walking and cycling on the public highway network more generally, partly in response to the pandemic. Some of the walking and cycling investment is from Govt Covid relief. The council will also be making a new investment of over £360,000 in promoting green access in Suffolk over the next couple of years in an initiative called Discovering Suffolk. The project will raise awareness of Suffolk's countryside, building upon Covid-19 associated behavioural changes, and promoting local outdoor activity across Suffolk.

Whilst county council budgets generally will remain under significant pressure over the coming years, the council values its green access network highly and this will be reflected in green access budgets.

Kind regards

Andrew Reid  
Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs County Councillor for Wilford

END – AW/SCC January 2021