

SUFFOLK LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

ANNUAL REPORT 2009–2010

Introduction

1. As required by the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002 I have pleasure in submitting the seventh Annual Report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum to Suffolk County Council as the highway authority.
2. The Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) was formed under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) in 2003. SLAF acts as an independent body to advise the Council on matters relating to rights of way and access to the countryside. It is also a statutory consultee for Natural England on mapping of open country and plans and policies produced by a wide range of organisations. The forum is administered by Suffolk County Council.
3. It is made up from those interested in access to the countryside and rights of way including users, landowners, land managers, members of community organisations and conservation interests.
4. Full membership for 2009/10 is listed below.

Our Work

5. The SLAF met four times during the past year at quarterly intervals to discuss a range of issues that have arisen from consultations, presentations, papers, reports and site visits from amongst others, the Council, Alde and Ore Futures, Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project, DEFRA, Elveden Estate, England Access Forum, Forestry Commission, Highways Agency, Natural England, Network Rail, Stour and Orwell Estuary Action Group, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Pathfinder Project.
6. Members of the public are able to attend meetings and have the opportunity to raise items or comment on issues discussed or related to countryside access.
7. Members of SLAF attend regional meetings, conferences and forums to improve access in Suffolk.

SLAF Cost

8. SLAF have their own identity to ensure they are clearly recognisable as an independent body with letter heading with PO address box and an independent email address.
9. The cost for servicing SLAF for 2009-2010 was approximately £2,000. This includes secretariat, room hire, member travel expenses to attend meetings and recruitment. To place this in context, the overall budget for Countryside Access is £1.2M.

Investment in Rights of Way

10. We congratulate officers on successfully obtaining funds through the Local Transport Plan and Natural England's Open Access Management Grant Scheme providing a range of improvements to the rights of way network and open access land. Continued efforts to obtain developer contributions to rights of way improvements through Section 106 Agreements is

supported and encouraged by the Forum. It is hoped that officers will be successful in a bid for European funding 'BALANCE' and delivering a project for St Edmundsbury Borough Council.

11. The Forum welcome the opportunities that the Local Transport Plan 3 offers with a focus on healthy activity and re-iterate that the distribution of funds do not favour urban areas at the expense of developing sustainable access in rural areas, and that the needs of pedestrians using footpaths are fully considered when allocating funds.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) – mid-term review

12. The Forum supports the mid-term ROWIP review and agrees with the priorities set for the next five years.
 - a) Investment to protect and maintain priority routes, devolving activities to local communities, where practicable. Use planning process, external sources and LTP3 programme to invest in countryside access, improving connectivity, inclusiveness and sustainable access to services.
 - b) Protect and where possible enhance public access in response to coastal and estuarine changes.
 - c) Work with Highways Agency to address PRoW severed by trunk roads.
 - d) Consolidate Definitive Map, prioritising routes for Ipswich Definitive Map and add working copy of Definitive Map onto SCC website.
 - e) SLAF supports the Discover Suffolk project and stress the importance of countryside access to tourism, especially the rural tourism economy, and highlight the need to invest in raising awareness of countryside access including activities such as walking, cycling and horse riding to develop healthier, stronger communities.

Coastal Issues

13. The Forum was kept informed with the progress of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, now the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The Act includes provision for a coastal path around the coastline of England. SLAF members attended a regional consultation event in Ely on 18 January 2010. The Forum strongly supports the Council's position in ensuring that the Act provides effective access along Suffolk's coastline and protects and, where possible, enhances public access in response to coastal and estuarine change.
14. The Forum is concerned for the needs of local communities. Members are involved in the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Action Group and the Alde and Ore Futures. Both groups address the needs of communities, access users and conservation in light of a changing coastline.
15. The Forum received a presentation on the Coastal Pathfinder project and welcomes the efforts of the Project Officer in addressing the needs of communities affected by coastal change.
16. The Forum responded to the draft Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan. We, expressed concern that the Plan did not pay regard to ensuring an adequate rights of way network along Suffolk's coast or that in consultation

with Natural England, ensures a suitable coastal path is provided that adequately provides for cyclists and horse riders to access the coast in the future.

17. The Forum stresses the need to ensure compatibility between the various coast and estuary related studies.

Rights of Way Crossing Trunk Roads – A11 dualling

18. The Forum had raised concerns with relevant organisations and individuals, including the Highways Agency (HA), MPs, land owner and Natural England expressing concern at the lack of provision for rights of way users across the proposed dualling of the A11 between Barton Mills and Thetford.
19. SLAF received a letter from HA dated 7 August 2009 confirming an underpass had been included in the scheme.
20. SLAF withdrew its objection to the scheme by letter dated 20 October 2009, and are pleased that the needs of NMUs are now recognised in the scheme's design.
21. SLAF members attended a site visit of the proposed route on 8 October 2009 and met with the Estate Manager of Elveden Estates to discuss public access.
22. SLAF Vice Chair was subsequently invited to offer views on dealings with HA in a Stakeholder Survey.
23. The Forum raised the general issue of rights of way severed by trunk roads with Natural England (NE) through the England Access Forum (EAF).
24. The Forum supports and encourages the work of officers in other work with HA to improve access at a number of trunk road crossings points.

Open Access

25. Suffolk County Council manages 12,500 acres of open access land with the highest level of restrictions in England. The Forum is a statutory consultee on the making of long term directions by Natural England (NE). The Forum recognises the need for restrictions and takes a flexible approach in its responses to directions.
26. NE presented their review of directions for conservation on open access land in Suffolk at a meeting held in Thetford on 18 November 2009, followed by NE attending a SLAF meeting on 14 January 2010 to present to all members.
27. NE identified open access restrictions for 2010 and reported few problems with open access in Suffolk. The Forum highlighted issues of irresponsible dog ownership and felt it was necessary to continue to monitor use and bird disturbance annually. The Forum press for funding to support a warden throughout the summer season.
28. The Forum questioned NE on whether the least restrictive options are pursued in all cases. We are concerned that the needs of people are continually overlooked for conservation reasons.
29. NE consulted the forum on directions at a site to the east of the county. SLAF objected on the grounds that it would create further restrictions to

public access in a popular tourist destination. The objection was addressed and direction implemented by NE.

30. SLAF congratulates the Council in successful bids to NE's Access Management Grant Scheme to provide wardening, conduct monitoring and carry out a series of quality site assessments in 2009-10.

Other Issues

31. SLAF had raised concerns over locating wind farms adjacent to public rights of way and consulted with other LAFs and the England Access Forum (EAF) to raise the matter at a national level.
32. SLAF support the presence of EAF as a means of sharing advice between forums, raising issues at a national level and ensuring greater recognition of LAFs by government departments and other organisations.
33. The Forum received an update on the development of Access Suffolk (community involvement scheme). This scheme enables local communities to improve countryside access and raise awareness of their local countryside.
34. The Forum felt that stronger emphasis should be placed on access by Natural England when targeting Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship Schemes.

Consultations

35. SLAF has been consulted on:
 - a) Amendments to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as a result of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009
 - b) DEFRA Consultation on Structures.
 - c) Dualling of A11 by Highways Agency.
 - d) Highways Agency Stakeholders Survey.
 - e) Natural England consultation on Livestock and Access
 - f) Open Access directions by NE.
 - g) Study of Public Forest Estates.
 - h) Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan.

Meetings

36. SLAF members have attended meetings on:
 - a) Eastern Region LAF Conference – David Barker (Vice Chair) presented SLAF's experiences with HA on the dualling of the A11
 - b) Natural England directions for conservation on Open Access
 - c) Regional LAF Chair Meeting.

Presentations

37. SLAF has had presentations on:
 - a) Access Suffolk (community involvement scheme).
 - b) Alde and Ore Futures.

- c) England Access Forum.
- d) Local Transport Plan (LTP) 3
- e) Pathfinder Project.
- f) Rights of Way Improvement Plan – mid-term review.

Site Visit

- 38. Elveden Estate – A site visit with Jim Rudderham, Estate Manager, on 8 October 2009 was arranged to learn more of the issues surrounding the proposed dualling of the A11 and access for non-motorised users.

Membership of SLAF

- 39. During the past year there have been four meetings, all of which were very well attended.
- 40. Three members resigned at the end of their term of office in April 2010. The retiring members include John Pearson (Chair 2006-2010), Bryan Freemantle and Angela Brown.
- 41. SLAF members thanked John Pearson for his chairmanship of the Forum for 6 years and commitment to countryside access in Suffolk.
- 42. SLAF members elected Bryan Collen as the new Chair from April 2010 for a three year term.
- 43. SLAF members re-elected David Barker as the Vice Chair for a further one year term.
- 44. Five new members were recruited/appointed to SLAF in 2009/10. A full membership and attendance list for 2009/10 is provided (Appendix B).

Looking Ahead

- 45. The practice of making at least one site visit per year will continue.
- 46. Members welcome the opportunity to work closely with officers of the Council on:
 - a) ROWIP
 - b) Coastal management and coastal access.
 - c) Improvements of rights of way crossings on trunk roads.

Main Recommendations for Suffolk County Council to consider are:

- a) The Forum recognises the pressures on budgets and the focus of the New Strategic Direction but encourages the Council to continue investing in countryside access and public rights of way and allocating additional investment through Local Transport Plan 3, and seeking investment through other funding sources and partnership projects to reflect the importance of access for stronger, healthier communities and the rural tourism economy.
- b) The Forum considered and endorses the mid-term review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and agrees with the priorities set for the next five years including protection and maintenance of priority routes, devolving activities to local communities where practicable, consolidating the Definitive Map and

developing Discover Suffolk to promote healthier communities and a more sustainable economy.

- c) The Forum considers that Suffolk County Council should give a high priority to public rights of way to ensure continued access along the shoreline when addressing coastal and estuarine movement and retreat.
- d) SLAF provide an efficient, balanced and cost-effective forum providing an important advisory service to the Council and other organisations by raising issues regarding how the public access the countryside and use the public rights of way network for leisure, health and sustainable travel options.

Bryan Collen
Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

David Barker
Vice Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

JULY 2010

SUFFOLK LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Members Details

Councillor Jenny Antill – A retired investment banker, Jenny is a Member of Babergh District Council for Waldingfield. Closely involved with local conservation group, Jenny is keen to protect the vulnerable green edges of the town, while encouraging the citizens of Sudbury to get out into the countryside.

David Barker (Vice Chairman) – With his wide experience within the NFU, CLA and as a former Countryside Agency commissioner, David seeks to work to balance all interests involved in countryside access. David is also Chair of Creating the Greenest County.

Angela Brown – (retired April 2010) Angela has a long-standing involvement in long distance horse riding and is a member of the Mid-Suffolk Bridleways Association.

Bryan Collen – (appointed Chair April 2010) Brian has been involved in the NFU, Anglian Water, Internal Drainage Boards and the County Council's Rights of Way Liaison Committee.

Bryan Freemantle – (retired April 2010) Bryan worked as county access and bridleways officer for the British Horse Society for 8 years. He also worked on a large country estate in Suffolk for 10 years and attended agricultural college.

Barry Hall – Barry is a retired local government officer with experience of working on countryside and rights of way projects. Barry retains an interest in countryside access as a member of RSPB, SWT and NT.

Margaret Hancock – (recruited April 2010) Margaret is a Blue Badge Tourist Guide. A keen cyclist, Margaret is passionate about promoting sustainable tourism by encouraging walking, cycling and the use of public transport. Margaret is a volunteer for the Out and About charity, providing support for children and young people with disabilities.

Ann Langley – (recruited April 2010) Ann is involved with the Pony Club, the Easton Harriers Hunt, and is a founder member of the Mid-Suffolk Bridleways Association which works to maintain and open bridleways. Ann is also Councillor on Ashfield cum Thorpe Parish Council.

Councillor Sandy Martin – Ipswich Borough Council and SCC Councillor. Sandy Martin lived in Halesworth from 1971 to 1993, and has lived in Ipswich since then. He is a keen walker and cyclist. He was elected to Suffolk County Council in 1997 and to Ipswich Borough Council in 2002, and is currently a Councillor on both Authorities. He acted as deputy to the County Portfolio Holder for Environment & Transport from 2001 to 2005, and is now opposition spokesman for environment at Ipswich Borough Council and Leader of Suffolk County Council Labour Group

Gordon Merfield – With a background in agriculture, since the 1980's Gordon has been active in participating and coaching in field sports events as well as being interested in the wider countryside and walking in foreign countries.

Alan Moore – (recruited April 2010) Alan is a retired Head of Regional Planning and Transport for the East of England Regional Assembly, and is now a volunteer with the Stroke Association and West Suffolk Headway. With a particular focus on access for disabled people, Alan is interested in the issue of local access and the need to ensure that it is properly and effectively provided for in both urban and rural areas.

Mary Norden – (recruited April 2010) Mary works for the RSPB, is a member of Suffolk Bat Group, a bat worker for Natural England and supports the Bat Conservation Trust's national monitoring programmes. Mary is also a keen walker and cyclist.

John W Pearson (retired April 2010 – Chairman 2006-2010) – A former Principal at Otley College, John was involved in all aspects of countryside development, with professional qualifications in horticulture, agri-conservation, environment and business management, a county member of NFU and director of British Landscape Industry training organisation.

Monica Pipe – Monica farms just north of Ipswich and has many well-used footpaths on her land including the promoted Fynn Valley Walk.

Norman Southgate – Rights of way officer for the Suffolk Landrover Owners Club, Norman keeps members aware of where they can legally go off-road. He is a keen sailor and member of the Copdock & Washbrook footpath maintenance working group.

Councillor Jane Storey – (appointed January 2010) SCC Councillor for Thedwastre North, has interests around walking, dog-walking, off-road driving and being a farmer's daughter with some strong views along the lines that with rights come responsibilities. Jane believes that we should preserve our Rights of Way, including BOATS and Bridleways, but not at the expense of common sense. These are an important part of presenting Suffolk as the Greenest County, useful for getting from A to B, but also for getting people who do not normally exercise out and about at little or no expense.

Mike Taylor – With a Forestry Commission background, Mike brings experience of managing large tracts of land as a business whilst ensuring that conservation and public access are fully taken into account.

John Wayman – A former district council member farming in the Stour Valley, John feels that he now would like to contribute to a the wider rural picture.

Anthony Wright – A long-term cyclist and walker, Anthony has worked with several local authorities on the production of cycling and walking publications and works part time with the sustainable transport charity Sustrans.