

LAF Conference

East of England Region - 10th March 2008

1. Attendance

23 people attended the event including:

- 8 Local Access Forums from within the region (Essex, Herts, Suffolk, Norfolk, The Broads, Bedfordshire, Peterborough)
- 3 LAFs from outside the region (Bucks, Surrey and Tyne & Wear)
- and 3 Natural England officers

2. Programme

The event covered a range of topics relevant to the LAFs and the region, including:

- Characteristics of effective and successful LAFs and key issues and opportunities for them
- Green-infrastructure planning - rationale behind the approach, purpose of GI strategies, progress across the region, how LAFs are and can be involved. Where next?
- The role and remit of the NAF - presentation and discussion about its purpose and likely effectiveness. More nominations for representatives for the region will be sought and an election run.
- A discussion on the successes and experiences from within the room
- The LAF Manual - designed to complement the official guidance and include good practice examples. Target launch date end May '08.

Workshops

- The LAFS role in making the ROWIP happen - using Bedfordshire's experience to show how LAFs can make a positive difference to ROWIP implementation at strategic level and on the ground
- Agri-environments schemes and targeting Higher Level Stewardship - how access fits within the agri-environment schemes, and more importantly how we can target permissive access through the schemes, plus the potential risks surrounding walking away from some areas of the countryside, in how the schemes are delivered.
- Support and help available to LAFs - exploring ways that the LAFs can get support for themselves and each other, from within their own ranks, the appointing authority as a whole, and a wide range of regional and national organisations.

3. Feedback

Feedback was positive with

- 79% finding the day very helpful
- 21% finding it helpful
- 63% reporting that the day raised their awareness of new developments and opportunities a lot
- 37% saying it had done so a bit
- At the end of the event 47% were much more motivated
- 47% were a bit more motivated, only 1 person was 'much the same'

Comments on what was the most useful part of day included :

- 'Learning about the positive experiences of other LAFs'
- No specific part - so all of the ideas and interaction were useful'
- 'Networking outside of our region'
- 'General discussion with others'
- 'The morning session - though workshops were also v good'
- 'Meeting lots of LAF members'
- 'The ROWIP workshop and the Green Infrastructure presentation'
- 'Interaction'
- 'The agri-environment workshop'
- 'The ROWIP workshop'

Comments on how the day has made people feel about their work / LAF included :

- 'Ahead of the game and seemingly functioning well but could do better'
- 'Good'
- 'More devoted'
- 'Depressed'
- 'Need to up the anti'
- 'That it should be possible to achieve something'
- 'Need to keep building it up and give support'
- 'Considerably more encouraged'
- 'Fairly frustrated'
- 'We have to outreach to other statutory bodies'
- 'That so much more is possible'
- 'Hopeful that we may improve'
- 'Very positive'
- 'I want to gain more influence with the local authorities' decision makers'
- 'Challenged and inspired'

Other comments

- 'A useful day learning about what is new on access and about successful case studies'
- 'Nice people to meet and appreciate their enthusiasm'
- 'A very well-constructed and delivered event with excellent mix of presentations and activities'
- 'V good day lots of new ideas and perspectives'
- 'A well organised day. Exchanged a lot of information and advice'
- 'Green Infrastructure summary of slides was very useful'
- 'The Access Company always do a good job - I like their style'
- 'Projected images illegible much of the time - too small'
- 'Well-organised. Something in 2009 please'
- 'Seems that LAFs need a strong civil servant or local govt representation on the LAF is more than a bonus, it's a must. Like with the old school tie - the doors of power/influence are more readily opened'

Excited	The word that best describes how I feel after today about my LAF is:		Can do more than just Rights of Way
Hamstrung	Good	Useful	Frustrated
Empowered	Hopeful	Informed	Under-achieving
Need to ensure our voice is heard	Encouraged	It's a leader in the region	That they could do so much more

After today one thing I am personally going to do to make my LAF more influential:			
Get more involvement from Planning depts	Feed back from this event and look at more funding	Be more involved in communicating activities	Set up Parish Path Partnerships
Involve in ROWIP related issues more	Raise profile	Try & make contacts with even more organisations	Pass on the useful ideas just picked up to my own LAF
Get better support from higher level officers/members at county	Try even harder to make sure each LAF member takes responsibility for a specific issue	Introduce new initiatives - e.g. tie in with Health Agendas and Primary Care initiatives	Try to let more people know that the LAF exists
Communicate today's bullet points to my LAF	Communicate better to the outside world about LAF and its role	Prepare backing papers and request they may be placed on the agenda	Ask for Nolan principles to be incorporated into standing orders

I feel the best issues that LAFs in this region could collaborate on to improve things:			
Interrelate more - Essex needs <i>help</i>	Green infrastructure for growth	Cross border issues	Pressure on government policies
Exchange best practice - LAF handbook? Reg'nal Newsletter? Web site -national or regional?	Develop a regional voice to ensure access & env. issues are considered in the wider population growth and planning policies and strategies	Shaming their highway authorities into maintaining Rights of Way better	Get more publicity so that the general public are aware and will support
Common issues of planning providing access in new developments	Acting as a regional body where relevant (bigger voice)	Raised profile and publicise their success	Best practice and regional planning liaison

4. Organisation and planning

Overall the event was well planned. All sessions ran to time. The speakers were well prepared and made good constructive contributions. The workshop sessions and discussions were lively.

All presentations and supporting material is available on The Access Company's website in the download area.

<http://www.theaccesscompany.co.uk/downloads.asp>

5. Venue and catering

The venue was good, with all rooms suitable for use. The catering was good. It stimulated two participants to comment 'a great venue'.

Overall no complaints.

Thanks to Sally Fishwick for her introduction, support and for supplying the data projector. To the speakers and workshop leaders Catherine Cairns, & Darren Brain from Natural England, Ken Taylor from Asken Ltd and Phill Fox from Bedfordshire County Council.

13/03/2008
Nicky Rowbottom