

LAF Conference

SW Region – 12th March 2008

1. Attendance

- 35 people attended the event
- 10 LAFs (out of 12) were represented by 9 chairs, 3 vice chairs and 12 members
- Nine National Park Authority/County Council staff (either PROW/RoWIP officers and/or LAF secretaries)
- Two Natural England officers
- Speakers included a LAF chair, a National Park authority officer, a Natural England officer, and a local authority officer

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
- The NAF - presentation and discussion about its history, purpose, constitution and the discussions at the set-up meeting in January this year, including NE's recreation policy review and ROWIPs.

The system and timetable for electing the two representatives for the region was decided: one post to be a chair/vice-chair elected by chairs, the other by all LAF members. After discussion it was agreed the Chairs present would select one representative and, at a subsequent round table discussion, Bob Harvey, Chairman of Devon CAF (landowner) was put forward for the English National Access Forum

(See appendix A for fuller notes)

3. Workshops

Diversity and improving accessibility. What is access and what are the barriers? Information as one of the most powerful ways to improve accessibility. Including a case study of the role played by a LAF in a National Park in advising on the need for information for disabled people; how that advice was taken up by the NP Authority and what the Authority is now doing and planning. (See Appendix B)

Empowering the LAF - how the LAF can take control and have greater influence by taking a more proactive and strategic approach to its work, supported by revisions to the latest Defra LAF guidance. (See Appendix C)

Getting involved in wider 'green space' agendas. Exploring how LAFs can influence this agenda, given that requirements for 'green infrastructure' within new housing developments can lead to an extensive network of green spaces, which can provide recreational space at the heart of new communities, and links to country parks and the deeper countryside. (See pdf file for the slides from Andy Gale's presentation)

Multi-use routes - an excellent way of providing inclusive access for vulnerable users. Often valuable transport links, they can be a tourist / visitor attraction in their own right - think Camel Trail or Bristol Bath Railway Path. This session looked at good practice in their development, design and surfacing considerations and how to minimise conflict. (See Appendix D)

4. Issues which arose during the day (posted on the "Issues Park")

The loss of the Discovering Lost Ways project means the loss of many interconnecting routes for the RoWIP in areas which have not had a systematic Definitive Map Review.

LAFs should be part of the consultation process for LDFs as green infrastructure us coming forward as part of the planning process.

Natural England should produce a leaflet like the Countryside Commission's early leaflet to let people know what is happening and raise awareness.

5. Feedback

Feedback was positive with

63% finding the day very helpful

37% finding it helpful

57% reporting that the day raised their awareness of new developments and opportunities a lot

40% saying it had done so a bit

At the end of the event 40% were much more motivated

47% were a bit more motivated

The workshops all met participants' expectations

Diversity and improving accessibility (a lot 75%; a bit 25%)

Empowering the LAF (a lot 89%; a bit 11%)

Getting involved in wider 'green space' agendas (a lot 82%; a bit 12%)

Multi-use routes (a lot 69%; a bit 31%)

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

Gossip	Inspiration from meeting other LAF members
The knowledge received	
Networking x9	Learning about a wider perspective, meeting new contacts
Workshops x2	Meeting and discussing cross practice working
The whole day x3	Green infrastructure
Reinforcing that what you do is right - and sharing	Greenspace policy agenda - more info!!
Difficult to specify - it was all useful	The support network
Green spaces discussion	Empowering the LAF x7
Finding out about upcoming policy - green infrastructure - this is extremely important	Workshop on diversity and access x2

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

Positive	Hopefully doing some good
...the same - it's very worthwhile	We're doing quite well but always room for improvement
Invigorated to push through some new initiatives	Better

Positive - if a bit helpless in an unelected authority (DNPA)
Satisfied that LAFs have a useful role in which I am prepared to play a part
My LAF is inhibited by the LA
A talk shop - little achieved - lack of funds to support any proposals/ improvements
Members need increasing in numbers and empowerment
Hopefully LAF is more focussed on priorities than takes on other work
More hopeful of future achievements
We are part of a national organisation must retain local values
It brings together a good combination of different viewpoints and enables working together

Other comments

Very valuable and should be repeated periodically
Having the choice of just 2 workshops worked well
Stronger links with the work of other Forums wd be useful
Skip tea break and finish earlier (and shorten lunchtime)
Looking forward to next year's event
It is a very stimulating day, a useful recharging of batteries, esp. meeting people from other areas
Good venue and catering - well organised
A useful day

Very positive
The LAF needs more information about what consultation documents are being issued - hard copies please
Greatly encouraged to continue the good work into the future
Encouraged x2
Very positive
Ready to take ideas to the membership for 'projects' to do
More positive to do more and be more proactive
We can do more - need to be more proactive as a whole forum
Positive for greater effect

Consultations between LAFs and sec 94(4) bodies essential
Good venue and programme. Thanks to Hilary
Thanks to Hilary and Colin for everything
Good informative day at an excellent venue
Great lunch and venue
A v useful day as usual and food for thought
Regional strategy very important
Take care not to create an empire with more chiefs than Indians - not top-heavy
Steve was very enthusiastic

6. Organisation and planning

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

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

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

7. Venue and catering

The venue was good, with all rooms suitable for use. The catering was good.

8. Overall no complaints.

Grateful thanks to Hilary Winter for her contribution to the organisation of this event, to Colin Jones for his introduction and support. To the speakers and workshop leaders: Ray Newbigin from Bath & NE Somerset Joint LAF, Sarah Manchester from the New Forest National Park, Will Steel from Bath & NE Somerset Council and Andy Gale from Natural England.

*Nicky Rowbottom
The Access Company
18-03-08*

Appendix A

Discussion - English National Access Forum- SW representatives

John Gibson proposed and it was agreed the two representatives should be:-
Chairs' choice - selected by Chairmen
Second representative - selected by all members.

Ray Newbigin was thanked for his morning presentation.

There was general discussion on the English National Access Forum. The following points were seen as important:-

- Regional influence and differences
- Terms of office for forum representatives
- Terms of office should be staggered to allow continuity
- A three year term for one representative and a two year term for the other was seen as best and would allow people to get into the role
- Representatives should come from different LAFs, ideally urban/rural and with different interests
- The national forum should reflect different types of LAF and interests
- The English National Access Forum needed to consider:-
 - Succession planning
 - Substitutes - whether these would be permitted
 - Regional differences

It was anticipated the regional coordinators would play a significant role in supporting the flow of information from the English National Access Forum to individual LAFs. The disparity in regional support was acknowledged and it was recognised the SW was in a more fortunate position than other regions. Securing adequate regional support across the country was seen as vital

The Regional Coordinator, Hilary Winter, agreed to e-mail a timetable for nominating and selecting the second representative by mid April. To overcome the disparity in the size of forum membership across the region, one vote per LAF was suggested. Those present did not preclude the possibility of members who were not chairmen standing for nomination.

After discussion it was agreed the Chairs present would select one representative and, at a subsequent round table discussion, Bob Harvey, Chairman of Devon CAF (landowner) was put forward for the English National Access Forum.

Appendix B

Workshop notes - Diversity and Improving accessibility

1) (Handout) Diversity - meeting the individual's needs

Access - what does it mean? a whole range of different things to different people :
Climbing a mountain, a walk in the woods, taking the dog out, seeing a beautiful view, a picnic

Getting muddy, staying dry

Being challenged, feeling safe, not getting lost

Feeling alive, refreshed, calm ...

It doesn't matter what your level of fitness or ability, or disability, or cultural background, you may want to experience any of these.

Meeting individual's needs means offering a range of experiences. It doesn't mean everywhere has to be the same - that would be impossible and undesirable.

DDA says services must (as far as reasonable) be accessible to everyone - what this actually means in reality for the countryside, and what is reasonable, has yet to be fully tested in law but there are a number of approaches being taken:

Least restrictive approach - most authorities have adopted this approach to countryside furniture - to consider whether any furniture is needed - can a gap be left? If not can it be a gate? If not a kissing gate ? - several authorities stop there and no longer install stiles at all.

'Fully accessible routes' - it is common for authorities or site managers to build routes which are designed to be accessible to everyone (using wheelchair users as the measure). These are expensive to build and must be done jointly with the people they are aimed at to ensure they go to the right places, and are truly accessible. They have got better as knowledge has increased.

Accessibility audits - routes or sites can be audited to record the information people need to help them decide if they can visit. This includes info such as path widths, gradients, surfaces, barriers, seats and resting places, passing places. Also info on car parking, public transport, toilets, and crucially what there is to see - what the site can offer. These are often used to generate work programmes to make improvements to increase accessibility.

Provision of information to help people make up their own minds.

The audits collect huge amounts of info - making that accessible to the public in an easy to understand way is not straightforward.

Information on site - waymarking, and information panels

So what stops all routes being accessible to everyone ?

Physical barriers - gates/stiles - for controlling stock - not a service provided by the authority, actually the responsibility of the landowner

Control features - barriers to prevent motorbikes / vehicles illegally using routes

Terrain - gradient / surface

Authority budget

What are the biggest barriers ?

Lack of information on what the route is like

Lack of confidence - will the route actually be okay ? Where can they go?

Lack of knowledge or understanding

How can the LAF be involved in this area of work ?

Does your LAF have a diversity / disabled rep or sub-group ?

Do you know what your authority is already doing ?

Would you be interested in carrying out audits ? or testing 'accessible' routes ?

Or identifying places where stiles can be removed ? or dog gates added?

Or discussing these with landowners ?

Can you be involved in information provision ?

Are there places locally people want to go but can't easily get to ?

Does the authority know about these ? how can they find out ?

Put yourself in the authority's shoes - they have an opportunity to create or improve a route to increase accessibility. How do they know which to do first? how can you help ?

What about increasing opportunities to other groups - people from other cultures, young people, people with learning difficulties ?

How can the LAF help with ensuring everyone can enjoy their environment?

Three useful **publications** from the Countryside Agency's Diversity Review

- By All Reasonable Means (Inclusive access to the outdoors for disabled people)
- A Sense of Freedom (The experiences of disabled people in the natural environment.)
- Capturing Richness (Countryside visits by black and ethnic minority communities)

See www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Recreation/DR/GuidanceAwareness.asp or contact

Natural England Publications, Communisis Print Management, Balliol Business Park West , Benton Lane . Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 8EW, Email: natural.England@communisis.com Telephone: 0800 694 0505

(2) Presentation - Sarah Manchester Countryside Access Officer, New Forest National Park

New Forest Access Forum - 2005, each member took one area of disability and looked at the needs and what was available in the New Forest area and then the Forum made recommendations.

New Forest National Park Authority - 2007 commissioned research - what info and how to portray

The Access Company report: Poor response to questionnaire

Needs of

Deaf people- easy to understand, visual

Blind and partially sighted people- clearly presented, location info for transport

Learning difficulties - photographs, diagrams, 'easy read'

Mobility - detailed, accurate information, judgements not made

Information to include:

- Map - a must. Diagrammatic, or OS 1:10,000
- Car parks - include info about reserved spaces
- Symbols for
- Gradient
- Cross slope
- Limitations - gates, stiles, steps
- Facilities - benches, picnic areas, toilets
- Path surface - incl. any hazards
- Links to additional info
- Mobile phone coverage
- Location - incl. nearest town/village, nearest public WC
- What might impact route - e.g. weather
- Key experiences - riverside, woodland, etc
- General nature - busy, network/linear,
- Photographs - where illustrating nature of site/route
- Any specific provision - interpretation panels, audio guide, tactile trail

Summary and Full Accessibility Statements both needed

Available via

- Printed leaflet - downloadable or TIC, library, etc - specialised graphic designer
- Searchable database
- Alternative formats - audio, Braille, large print, 'easy read'

Next steps

- NPA - commission report on pilot sites - woodland / coastal.
- Consider use of GPS.
- Once data collected, design searchable database around data collected.
- Use data to produce pdf
- Test with local groups / individuals / NFAF
- Fine tune
- Collect info for 10 more sites - populate database.
- Add to information base year on year.

(3) Discussion notes

- What does Access mean to you?
- Taking the dog out
- Taking the kids out
- Enjoyment, recreation
- Getting to and into places for people with disabilities
- How to get to somewhere - e.g. work
- ...and smell the flowers on the way
- How to get into - e.g. a shop
- Lack of barriers
- Inviting - encouraging, friendly
- Experience
- Countryside/parks/walks
- Overcoming barriers
- Awareness and confidence
- Ease of access -a local green space (within 300m)
- Quality of access - place with a view
- Standards of accessibility appropriate to the place
- Canoeing
- Symbols all different - need a national standard?

- Give info in as many ways as possible
- Where does this path go and how long will it take to get there?
- Promotion to schools - e.g. welly walks (short ones in Sept

- longer as they get older through the year); beating the bounds

Barriers

- Safety - perceptions of
- Dog mess and mud
- Signage and info - not right
- Fear of cows etc.
- Vehicle crime - can be hyped
- Physical barriers - stiles and lack of info about what barriers there are ahead
- Popularity - too many people, not appropriately managed
- Lack of public transport - & no/not enough bike provision on buses/trains
- Feeling uncomfortable because of not seeing other people like me in the countryside
- Perceptions - am I welcome?
- Animals? Dogs?
- Knowing where to go (info)
- How to get info
- Being able to interpret info
- Physical impairment
- Cultural
- Income
- Geographical isolation
- Transport
- Equipment - e.g. canoeing, riding
- Training - e.g. climbing, riding
- Confidence
- Crime
- Risk
- Discrimination
- Company
- Lack of facilitators to encourage unconfident people out

Points from the first workshop discussion

- Forestry commission - Neroche project - innovative work with putting route info and interpretation onto GPS. See www.nerochescheme.org/infoOnTheMove.php
- Focus on GPS will tend to benefit only the better off?
- Concern about the cost implications of putting together this amount of access info for a large geog area like a county. But it can still be more effective - and cheaper - than doing excessive physical access works on the ground.
- New Forest diversity strategy - running a grant scheme to provide free transport into the Forest for schools from areas of deprivation (worked out by particular post codes)
- Devon CAF attend the county and local shows and raise awareness
- Devon CAF have a member in a wheelchair who has contributed v usefully to site audits - changes made as a result e.g. to surfacing and gate closures
- Fixmestreet.com - software for the public good. A site which enables feedback to the appropriate authority on particular routes.
- Canoeing - access to water - lots of conflicts Canoeists vs fishing or canoeists vs landowners. (Univ of Brighton doing a pilot strategy)

Points from the second workshop discussion

- There is already a shocking overlapping of existing information leaflets etc. LAFs could usefully audit the information available to cut down repetition and raise the quality.
- Need to go out and meet communities/under-represented groups, not just wait for them to come to us
- New Forest diversity strategy - visitor services people have made strong links with the local Chinese community - not enough but it's a start
- Venues for LAF meetings need to be accessible themselves. Village halls are a good bet and their hire puts money back into the local economy.
- Ask disabled people where the good venues are for them.
- Diversity means a huge range of things to be aware of - faith, sexual orientation. It's v. enlightening to go to events. Depth & range of knowledge necessary is enormous.
- Giving the individual LAF members a research focus (as in the New Forest case) was very positive
- Chew Valley Lake - getting an accessible route round it - has been a v positive project for the Joint LAF. Networking with head of Bristol Water & with the Disabled Ramblers Assoc. - finding examples of success elsewhere to hold up as a model.
- Sensory trail on Bodmin moor and one on the Towans. Critical to balance with e.g. motorbike access.
- Listed stiles - problematic to change. Put in a gap beside them?
- Dartmoor LAF accessibility audit stimulated the design of a new kind of latch - horse riders find it OK. Put together and promoted an accessible route at Waltonhampstead. used by health walks,
- Somerset applied to NE for a grant to put together a one-stop shop website providing links to all the available disabled access information for their area. Budget squeeze means it hasn't happened yet. Still want to do it

Appendix C

Workshop notes - Empowering the LAF

(Morning session)

Proactively advising (7 votes)

How can this help?

- Justify our existence
- Tells 94(4) bodies of our functns
- Balance of proactive/reactive
- PRG consultation stages
- Gives LAF 'teeth'

Options to do this

- Sub grps - develop working practices etc
- request feedback
- develop independence (from councils - e.g. address/email)
- develop regional/national forums/structures
- regional workshop for sec 94(4) bodies by NE/ LAFs
- Invite section 94(4) speakers to LAFs - to speak abt their orgs but also to learn abt the LAF - 2 way training - agree future working relationship - approach the right person
- regular local (& national) press release re work of LAF. Highlight partnership working

Who can help

- LAF members
- LAF members to 'adopt' a section 94(4) body to monitor/request info re forthcoming consultations/ issues focussing on etc
- Local press - Build relationship. Regular slot!!? (issue press release, A4 size, after meeting)
- NE - advice re local sec 94(4) key contacts.

Prioritising and focussing on issues (6 votes)

Emphasising status of advice given by forums (4 votes)

Giving advice to section 94(4) bodies (3 votes)

How can this help?

- help to focus efforts/expertise - more effective/informed forum
- influence
- consultation on all matters where ROWs are concerned - broader - all access matters - but time?

Options to do this

- Annual work programme (with flexibility)
- themed meetings agreed as annual programme
- forum members taking the lead on issues re info gathering - feeding back to forums etc.
- Letter to PCs etc with a report /strategy promoting LAF remit. PCs don't know about LAFs. Broadening of statutory consultation.

Who can help

- Appointing LA officers
- Forum member networks - experts for speakers etc
- NE event - conference aimed primarily at Section 94(4) bodies - senior LA staff to explain role of LAFs - case studies nationally and regionally
- LAs shd support LAFs
- Supply all LAF members with RA Blue Book

Sub groups (7 votes)

How can this help?

- Enables LAF to tackle more matters
- consultation for time limits
- constitution - odd number - Max 3
- Meet on neutral ground
- informal/not public concerns
- Site visits
- Greater detail
- a very valuable/essential tool
- feedback from subgroups to wider forum - provides training to members

Options to do this

- Balance of members from the Forum Group
- Report in time - essential
- ?Surgeries/hearings

- Guidance currently restrictive - lessens 'teeth' of LAF ... if having to wait til next 'public' meeting of LAF - and advice not 'official' to Sec 94(4) bodies
- Propose - working group meets/minutes meeting -

distributes 'advice' to other members (electronic/post) for agreement - if major concern convene meeting or agree advice send to Sec. 94(4) & put on website for public attention

Who can help

- Free to ask advice from whoever can assist
- Bring in expertise - whoever
- NE ! up flexibility in guidance

Measuring effectiveness]

Influencing decision makers]

Business between meetings]

Lower priority - not discussed

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- Independent
- Influential
- Listening
- Recommending
- Effective
- Questioning
- Bringing together
- Proactive

Workshop notes - Empowering the LAF (Afternoon session)

Prioritising and focussing on issues (7 votes)

How can this help?

- LAFs are a mile wide but a foot deep
- Must prioritise and focus on things they can influence - i.e. the key issues
- reduce the size of the agenda and get to the bottom of things

Options to do this

- Consult with LAF before decisions made - required to consult
- Find a (specific) battle that can be fought and won
- PPS
- Making best use of limited resources
- Develop a work programme
- Regnl. strategy statements- to

Who can help

- build the right relationships with officers and members - LAFs are here to help the officers
- Advice/guidance from NE and Regional coordinator
- Other LAFs
- Forum members

Proactively advising (8 votes)

How can this help?

- Contact any person at any level
 - MP, leader of council, corporate director
- Raise awareness----- justify funding
- Raise the profile/get respect of key players
- Avoid the missing of opportunities

Options to do this

- Chairman's letter
- Get involved in consultation at early stage
- Calling highways to account
- Issue imaginative press releases - banners
- Informal networking

Who can help

- NE - info to 94(4) bodies
- Govt. - forums on standard consultation list
- Officers
- Use organisations

Measuring effectiveness (6 votes)

How can this help?

- Pitfalls - how you might improve
- what you've got right/wrong/missed
- it can raise awareness
- Justify funding (what funding?)
- What gets measured gets done

Options to do this

- Communication
- Funding/value for money
- Provide balanced/measured advice
- Annual targets - presentn to Councils
- Set clear, realistic objectives

Who can help

- Other LAFs
- Council website
- Regional co-ordinator
- Outside contributors
- Using inside expertise of forum members
- ROW officers/wardens check planning applics - feedback

TOP ACTIONS NOW

- Press officer - training
 - access restrictions
 - proactive
 - legal action
- Priorities decide
 - 3 meetings
 - Brainstorming session
 - Themed meetings
- Planning policy statement
- Find the time!
- Gain respect of senior council officers
- Role of chair
- High profile cases
- Insider info
- Quick win
- Regional meetings to continue (gossip)
- Funding
- S106

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- Successful
- Communicating
- Clarity access
- Recreation?
- Punchy
- Unique selling point

Appendix D

Workshop notes - Multi-use routes- the role of the LAF

Principles:

- Ask for an inclusive policy wherever possible for route development
- Ask for an evidence based approach to any decisions.
- Develop a relationship with Sustrans who have a crucial role in many projects around the country.
- Ensure that a proper consultation process is undertaken at the inception of the project and well before design work and land negotiations start.
- Ensure a reasonable code of conduct is prepared and publicised
- Remind everyone that considerate behaviour and tolerance to other users is the norm!
- Conflict is rare and can be managed.
- Details:
- Check legal status of route
- Check any proposed "permissive agreements" for duration, conditions, restrictions, etc
- Consider the likely balance of user on the route: utility v recreation; rural v urban v link between the two; walking, cycling and / or equestrian;
- Remember that this balance can vary on different sections of the same route and that different approaches may be required for each section.

Useful documents

CRN32 "How people interact on off-road routes" Countryside Agency (2001)
<http://naturalengland.communisis.com/NaturalEnglandShop/product.aspx?ProductID=d591df7c-b3d1-4070-8004-17df41db83f4>

"Conflicts On Multiple-Use Trails" - Synthesis of the Literature" North Carolina State University (1994)

www.imba.com/resources/bike_management/conflictsfull.html

CRN96 "On the right track: surface requirements for shared use routes"

Countryside Agency (2005) www.iprow.co.uk/gpg/index.php/Shared_Use_Routes

"Multi-use routes research - executive summary" Devon County Council (2005)

www.devon.gov.uk/index/transport/public_rights_of_way/rowip/rowip_research_reports.htm

FF04 "Shared Use Routes" Sustrans Information Sheet (2000)

www.sustrans.org.uk/webfiles/Info%20sheets/ff04.pdf

FF27 "The National Cycle Network and Public Rights of Way" Sustrans Information Sheet (1999) www.sustrans.org.uk/webfiles/Info%20sheets/ff27.pdf