

Cyclists and Walkers in Dalby Forest in the North York Moors

LAF NEWS

Quarter 1 2014/15

Issue 4

Welcome to the Conference Edition of LAF News

This edition of the LAF newsletter is dedicated to the 2014 LAF conferences held in Bristol and Durham in February and March respectively. We remain committed to holding these events, despite reduced budgets, because they are an important opportunity for representatives from all LAFs to come together to learn from each other - to inspire and be inspired!

We arranged the two events with support from our eight Natural England funded Regional Coordinators. We invited LAF members to suggest the topics of most interest to them and this led to a programme with a range of speakers and workshop facilitators from LAFs, Defra, Natural England - and other organisations with an interest in public access. The presentations included an update from Defra on the Deregulation Bill and how this is likely to impact on the recording of Public Rights of Way; briefing from two of the main lottery funding bodies on how LAFs can access lottery grants; a presentation by National Rail on rail crossings; workshops on Local Enterprise Partnerships and dogs in the countryside along with presentations by the Ramblers, the CLA and the NFU. The lively discussions within workshops and informally in the margins of the conferences, along with positive feedback, clearly demonstrated that the events were worthwhile and appreciated.

By holding two events, one in the north and one in the south, we aimed to minimise the distance attendees needed to travel, making attendance affordable to more LAF members. Three quarters of LAFs were represented by their Chairs or a nominated representative with 111 delegates in total attending both conferences. We were also fortunate to find suitable free venues: Natural England's office in Bristol, and Durham County Council's Council Chambers - generously provided by Durham County Council.

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The following series of short articles summarise the main points from the conference presentations and discussions, with links to more detail. We hope that this will help to share the benefits of the conferences with the wider network of LAF members.

As well as the conference, the newsletter includes a piece on the award winning Bream Parklands Green Infrastructure project in Dagenham. This Environment Agency led initiative brings together a wide ranging partnership with the vision and ambition to deliver improvements to people and the environment. We also hear about 'Pathwatch': a South Downs National Park LAF initiative, designed to reduce illegal and irresponsible motorised activity in the Sussex countryside.

Wendy Thompson, Principal Adviser, Engagement Programme, Access and Engagement National Team.

Deregulation Bill

Jonathan Tweney, Policy Adviser, Defra, presented a brief outline of the draft deregulation bill including: why it's been introduced, the proposals relating to public rights of way, whether they need primary and secondary or just secondary legislation, and the timetable for the passage of the bill. Questions at the end of the presentation included whether landowners would have the right to apply for a public path order, and whether the 2026 cut-off date proposal for historical claims would be commenced. There was also a request for more detail on the specific proposals. Follow these links to read the [responses](#), and to the full [presentation](#).

Lottery Funding

Olivia Gore, Funding Manager, Big Lottery Fund, gave a general overview of the Big Lottery Fund (BLF), its approach and mission. She gave specific details on the criteria for the Awards for All programme and explained how to find help and further information. (Follow these links to BLF presentations from [Durham](#) and [Bristol](#).) Questions covered topics such as: can BLF fund local transport schemes, and: do applicants need a bank account and constitution in order to apply?

In joint workshop sessions Julie Coxon, BLF and Ellen Creighton from Heritage Lottery Fund, discussed how LAFs could get involved with [BLF and HLF projects](#). At Durham an [HLF presentation](#) was given by Ellen Creighton: Grants Officer, North East Region.

Julie commented: "For me the benefit of this was an opportunity to talk about our open programmes – Awards for All and Reaching Communities - and also to co-present with Heritage Lottery. This helped LAF members to understand both funders different missions and therefore helped them focus on which funding strands would be most appropriate to them. I also ran through a few top tips for success, general rules of thumb which are appropriate to most funders, so hopefully that would be of help in thinking about funding applications in general."

Paths in Crisis



Anastasia French, Paths in Crisis Coordinator, Ramblers, presented the recent 'Paths in Crisis' report produced by the Ramblers. She talked about the Ramblers history of working on Rights of Way issues and explained the questions that were put to local authorities and formed the basis of the report. The report highlighted which councils were of concern in terms of overall performance on Public Rights of Way (PROW), quantified the backlog of Definitive Map Modifications Orders and highlighted the budget cuts in many local authorities. She also drew attention to how the

Ramblers are helping to care for PROW. Questions to Anastasia included whether the report considered the impact of climate change to the PROW network and whether the current PROW repair model was fit for purpose. Follow the links to a summary of the [presentation](#), and to the Paths in Crisis [report](#). Anastasia is happy to answer any other questions on the report (or any Ramblers campaigns).

anastasia.french@ramblers.org.uk

Access – The Land Manager's Perspective

Sarah Slade, National Access Adviser, CLA, started her presentation by describing how most people were land managers, reminding the audience that CLA members face issues we all face, relating to our properties, but often on a larger scale and whilst running a business. She drew attention to the particular issues CLA members faced in running a business on their land. Very few other businesses are open to the public like farms and it is important to take these business needs into account when considering access rights. The CLA are supportive of LAFs and advocate local solutions to local problems as the best way forward. She expressed concern that since the 1949 Act the balance had shifted to favour the user rather than the landowner. Although legislation allowed for diversions routes were often regarded as more immutable meaning that modernisation of the PROW network was difficult to achieve. Sarah was asked if the CLA shared good practice and case studies on their website and about how the CLA could work closer with young people, schools/scouts etc. Follow this [link](#) to read a summary of the presentation and responses to these questions.

Unrecorded Rights of Way and Farm Land

Ian Moodie, Flood Management and Access Adviser, National Farmers Union, focused on the range of issues that can affect farmers who face claimed historical rights of way on land that they manage. Examples included how livestock farmers need to enclose their animals, how routes on arable land can cause loss of farming productivity and how gates or other structures (e.g. bollards) may be important to reduce the risk of rural crimes caused by the opening up of the countryside.

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He also talked about safety and the natural environment particularly in modern farm yards and how a definitive map of all rights of way would be better for all concerned. Questions to Ian included whether farmers could research rights of way on their land to give them greater peace of mind and how often the obstacles to modifications are by the authority or neighbouring landowners. Follow this link to read the [responses](#) to these questions along with the full [presentation](#).

Rail Crossings and Public Rights of Way

Darren Ward, Network Rail, Commercial Scheme Sponsor, Chris Williams and Phil Graham, Network Rail Level Crossing Managers in Bristol and in Durham.



The 3 speakers presented Network Rail's aims and objectives regarding level crossings, providing some examples of misuse that have influenced current policy. They explained that Network Rail are closing level crossings whenever possible and this was supported by government funding. They provided details on what has already been achieved and what is planned for 2014-19. Questions by

delegates included whether Network Rail bridges are adopted by the local authority for future maintenance and whether Network Rail considered the risk of taking an alternative public footpath diversion along a highway verge, which might be equally dangerous.

Network Rail were happy to discuss particular local issues with LAF members. Follow the links to the [presentation](#), and a [summary](#) of the session with answers to questions raised.



Access for All

There were 2 different workshops under this broad theme, presented by Alastair Duncan and Joan Cundill from New Forest LAF in Bristol, and John Law from South Lincolnshire LAF in Durham.

Alastair and Joan presented three recent improvements to access in the New Forest for people with mobility impairments.

1. Sid and Floss's Easy-Going Walks Maps

These maps are a collection of 16 walks and 4 easy-access places which New Forest Access For All have surveyed and mapped for people with mobility difficulties. They are not aimed at serious ramblers, but for people looking for a pleasant day out in the New Forest who need good access information.

2. Inclusive Cycling

A range of specially designed bikes and trikes had been acquired for

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use in the New Forest National Park by those with a wide variety of disabilities. Lessons learnt and points to watch if seeking to replicate a similar scheme were shared.

3. New Forest Community Toilet Scheme

This joint project was developed by New Forest Access For All and is supported by the New Forest National Park Authority. Knowing that toilet facilities are available is a vitally important access issue for people with disabilities to plan and enjoy a day out. There are no public toilet facilities in the north of the New Forest which led to the development of this initiative. The scheme provides a list of businesses with toilet facilities which they are prepared to make available for use by visitors to the area allowing people with disabilities the option to explore this beautiful area of the National Park. [Follow link to presentation.](#)

John presented information on how the Lincolnshire & Rutland LAFs are producing routes suitable for people with disabilities. The literature relating to the routes included surface types, gradients etc. to enable people to make decisions on whether a route is suitable or challenging enough for them. The aim was to give people of all abilities more opportunities to enjoy the countryside. Also provided in the workshop was the "Let's Get Going" pack. This could be used by other LAFs, should they wish to follow a similar process to create routes suitable for the disabled. The presentation touched on investigations, which are being carried out on producing a standardised method of measuring and displaying Countryside For All routes UK wide and a suitable web site to display Countryside For All accredited routes. [Follow this link to the full presentation.](#)

For summaries of these workshops follow this [link](#) . You may also want to look at some [additional material](#) from the Durham conference, suggesting ways of getting people involved.

Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships

Natural England's Tom Butterworth and Rob Aubrook introduced the two partnerships. The workshops explored the engagement between the LAFs and the LNPs, identifying opportunities for joint working and shared objectives. With LEPs in the midst of writing their Strategic Economic Plans, the workshops identified engagement with the delivery of these plans as a major opportunity for the LAFs. The LNPs on the other hand do not have plans that they have been asked to create and so the value of engaging differs from area to area. We heard of some great examples of positive engagement and shared working with LNPs and with one or two LEPs but it was also evident that for most LAFs, engagement was proving difficult. This seemed to be largely due to a lack of time and a lack of awareness of what LAFs could contribute. The conclusion was that future work to share ways of working with LEPs and LNPs would be welcomed. Follow these links to the [presentation](#) and [summary](#) - including questions and answers - from this workshop.

Dogs and the Countryside.

Each conference included a presentation on Dogs and the Countryside. [The Bristol presentation](#) was given by Ellie Stevenson,

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Natural England and Suzanne Powner, Dorset Dogs, [the Durham presentation](#) by Dean Henry, Durham County Council. Both used information and case studies - with illustrative examples - to show different approaches taken to tackle dog issues. The introduction to the workshop included statistics from the Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey, and the discussion sessions that followed identified both the challenges and opportunities this large constituency of users represents to land managers, local authorities and LAFs.

In Bristol, Su Powner of Dorset Dogs was able to share the experience of a project established to tackle many of these issues through promoting responsible dog ownership and positive management for people with dogs in town, coast and countryside. Follow this [link](#) for more information on Dorset Dogs.



In Durham, Dean Henry, outlined a campaign which targets dog fouling including the promotion of Green Dog Walkers.

Follow this [link](#) to read a summary of the discussions from both conferences.

LAF Effectiveness

Andrew Poole, Leicestershire County Council and Bob Anderson, Cheshire East LAF both presented a range of issues and ideas about LAF effectiveness. Andrew outlined how Leicestershire County Council had actively promoted the Leicestershire LAF and ran a successful recruitment campaign in 2011-12. Promotion included leaflets, posters and banners, an innovative format for the LAF Annual Report, plus a well-attended day conference for stakeholders. Follow these links to [additional information](#) and a [promotional case study](#) from Leicestershire LAF.

The Forum also produced two combined press releases and briefing documents, publicising key issues with which user groups, parish councils and local communities were encouraged to get involved.

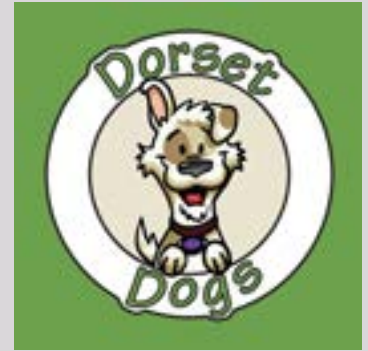
A detailed applicants pack was widely circulated, and backed-up by a well-targeted press release. The success of the campaign was helped by packaging it as a serious volunteer role and making it clear what was expected of forum members. Publicity highlighted the benefits to individuals of being a Forum member. Bob focussed on raising the profile of LAFs. In the workshop session discussion covered:

- Why raise the profile and how to set about doing this?
- Who should raise the profile and with who ?

The workshops highlighted good practice by other appointing authorities and raised a range of other issues related to recruiting and supporting Forum members. Follow this [link](#) to read the summary of the two presentations.

Conference Plenary Session

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Each event was rounded off by a plenary session, chaired by Liz Newton and Martin Shaw respectively, offering delegates the chance to raise any issues that they hadn't had chance to raise elsewhere.

Questions included ones about the conferences themselves, such as why there were two held this year rather than the one the previous year and how generally welcomed they are by the LAFs. Funding difficulties was mentioned and questions related to the talks and workshops from the day such as the Paths in Crisis report. Requests were made to Natural England for more updates on their access work and for additional networking for LAF Chairs.

The Chairs thanked members for attending, presenters for their contribution and staff for their effort in ensuring a smooth conference. Defra and Natural England expressed their gratitude to LAF members for their time in volunteering and acknowledged the contribution this made to improving public access. Whilst Natural England is happy to facilitate these conferences, the content is driven by the LAFs via the Regional Coordinators and we look forward to hearing your ideas for next year.

Notes and materials from both the conferences will be uploaded onto Huddle where there will be the opportunity for LAFs to continue the debate there. We now produce an annual report as a result of listening to LAFs, which goes to the Minister. This reflects the good work of LAFs and raises the profile. The main point of the conference is to enable members to meet and share good practice, it is an opportunity to network with other members and encourage LAFs to work smarter with information provided in workshops and shared around the conference.

Follow this link to the [plenary summary](#).

Other News:

BEAM PARKLANDS- Award winning Green Infrastructure in Dagenham.

Located in East Dagenham just north of the Ford Works is a 53 hectare open space that, until recently, was unwelcoming, poorly used by the local community, and subject to much anti-social behaviour. The site is part owned by the Environment Agency who had managed the Dagenham Washlands for flood storage since the 1960's. The remaining part of the site was owned by the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham including the site of a demolished Victorian smallpox isolation Hospital that had retained a semi natural buffer zone.

Environment Agency Landscape Architects in the National Environmental Assessment Service, NEAS, worked closely with their Flood and Coastal Risk Managements (FCRM) client to produce an inspiring vision for significant habitat, landscape and access enhancements across the site. The objective was to ensure multi functional benefits were achieved on the back of FCRM infrastructure refurbishment and the increase in the capacity of the flood storage area. The visionary Concept Plan extended the project footprint outside the 20 hectare Dagenham Washlands site to embrace the extended green space. This provided space outside the floodplain to utilise spoil from wetland excavation works but also delivered both partnership opportunities and wider green space improvements. From

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early on the project established an effective ethos of partnership and community working with joint landowners: the London Borough's of Barking & Dagenham and Havering, the Land Trust and Consultants Arup. The project obtained significant funding from the European Regeneration Development Fund that supplemented the Environment Agency's capital funding. The ERDF funding enabled a dowry to be put aside that will sustain site management into perpetuity. This is administered by the Land Trust. Other funding was sourced during the project development including from Natural England's Access to Nature that funded a Community Outreach Officer focussing on local schools and associated deprived and multicultural communities adjoining the park. A stunning new footbridge funded by Veolia land fill tax was installed as part of the project. This provided new access across the River Beam to the Parklands for a previously isolated community in South Hornchurch.

The Beam Parklands has won many Awards including most recently the Landscape Institute's Award 'Adding Value through Landscape' and the CIWEM 'Living Wetlands Award' in 2012. Working carefully around the sites already valuable wetland and acid grassland, extensive new habitat mosaics were created. The two watercourses, Wantz Stream and the Beam River were the subject of river restoration including re-profiling and re-meandering with opportunities provided for river access and viewing.

New water bodies were created within the floodplain including extensive reed beds that graded into wet fen and scrub. Site gateways were enhanced to encourage wider use of the previously under used open space. Attractive small scale 'natural' parkland including wildflower meadows and ponds with accessible gravel beaches were features visible from adjoining urban area. Spoil from pond and river bank excavation works was creatively used to provide gently sloping natural play mounds that instantly engaged local children. Enriched topsoil was buried beneath lower nutrient subsoil and sown with fine grasses and wildflowers to improve the perceptual quality of these features.

The open space has developed into a valued 'natural park enjoyed by the full spectrum of local people.

Richard Hellier, Environment Agency

Sussex Pathwatch

South Downs Local Access Forum, (SDLAF)

The problem of illegal and irresponsible vehicle use in the Sussex countryside was highlighted by parish councils, landowners, and members of the public. They reported damage to crops, gates, property and public rights of way, together with causing nuisance, distress, and increased fear of a serious accident.

Following meetings with Sussex Police and landowners regarding raves and travellers, Police Constable Mark Hillman helped to form a break-away group to target illegal off-road motor vehicles. The Police are the only organisation that can take action against these offenders, so it was essential to get them on board.

In the South Downs National Park, a pilot scheme was launched in Chichester District in 2006 by the South Downs Joint Committee

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(predecessor of the South Downs National Park Authority). The overall aim was: 'To reduce illegal and irresponsible motorised activity in the Sussex Countryside.'

The main objective of the pilot was (and still is) to encourage reporting of illegal activity and gain confidence that the Police would respond. This worked well and the pilot scheme was a success, with some parishes recording a 50 to 75% reduction in illegal activity, and resulting in some vehicle seizures and eventual crushing of vehicles.

Sussex Pathwatch has been expanded across the whole of East and West Sussex. It is a partnership project between South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), Sussex Police, West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and East Sussex County Council (ESCC). Key players also involved are landowners, parish councils, user groups (including British Horse Society, The Ramblers and Trail Riders Fellowship), the general public and other organisations (such as Forestry Commission and the National Trust).

Regular meetings are held between the key partners to ensure that successes continue. These meetings are now being attended by representatives from the Trail Riders' Fellowship and the British Horse Society to provide a balanced and fair view of the project and its actions. LAFs in the area are kept informed with regular reports, and currently two members of the South Downs Local Access Forum sit on the partnership meetings.

One of the objectives identified in the Sussex Pathwatch strategy is to educate PROW users, and those reporting incidents, about what constitutes illegal use. Many don't realise that if a motor vehicle is on a legal route it still needs to be road legal with tax, insurance, MOT, and number plate, and that motorcyclists must wear helmets.

Chief Inspector Martin Simms of the Sussex Police said: "as the vast majority of these motoring and damage offences are committed in the Countryside, Pathwatch not only promotes responsible driving and riding but encourages people to be our eyes and ears and report incidents. In this way we become more pro-active in dealing with rural issues and encourage the public to become more responsible for our beautiful Countryside".

Currently the group is working to create a code of conduct for users across East and West Sussex, together with an information sharing agreement so that statistics can be measured and successes noted. In the future we would like the group to deliver positives to users and try to find and promote events and locations where 4x4s and motorbikes can go legally, which are safer and more enjoyable for everyone.

To sustain police involvement it is essential to encourage reporting of incidents, by phoning 101 if it is a non-emergency, or 999 if it is a life-threatening incident.

There is now a Twitter account and Facebook page to be able to discuss problems and share what is happening - and this is a great way to communicate. However, this does not replace the reporting process as all calls need to be logged by the Sussex Police call centre.

For more information visit: www.pathwatch.info

Angela Ward, South Downs National Park PathWatch Coordinator

Links

Huddle specific links

Best Practice whiteboards

Workspace overview section of Huddle

Contact us

enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk