



# LAF NEWS

Issue 1: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013

## Welcome

(by Wendy Thompson, Natural England Principal Adviser for Access and Engagement)

Welcome to the first issue of this newsletter dedicated to keeping LAF members across England up to date about national issues and local good practice. The team at Natural England want this newsletter to be full of information that will help you to advise on public access wherever you are and whatever your views. Your stories are essential to making this happen and I look forward to hearing more from you to add to future editions.

Meanwhile in this edition we report back from the LAF national conference which was on the theme of sharing good practice and update you on how you can continue to share information on Huddle about what works well - and what doesn't. We also bring news of a new tool to help you to bring together facts and figures about the people who visit the natural environment in your area. Stories in this edition from LAFs include Durham's success in the dedication of access and Shropshire's approach to working with communities to create applications to the Paths for Communities grant scheme. We also feature some of the hot debates on Huddle as well as some tips on using Huddle. Remember anyone who has a computer can join Huddle and can contribute to the discussion forums and share information with other LAF members.

Natural England is keen to continue to support LAFs and we remain focused on helping to share ideas, suggestions and good practice along with attendance at meetings where we can add value. To provide clarity about our role we have produced the attached Engagement Plan which restates the roles and relationships of Defra, Natural England, the LAFs and their appointing authorities. We hope you find this useful.

We have limited statutory roles in relation to LAFs but one of these is to collate your annual reports. This year, for the first time, and in response to your feedback, we have created a national annual report with highlights from the 80 annual reports received. This has been presented to Defra is available for all LAFs on Huddle and via the LAF Chairs. This, along with the newsletter, will help to raise the profile of LAFs and the good work that you are achieving.

Please do respond to this newsletter with stories to share and with suggestions for how we can make this an effective way to keep you informed.

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## National Conference Report 2013

The theme of the conference was 'Sharing good practice and Sharing solutions'. The event took place in Sheffield at the end of February and was well attended by 99 members from 72 LAFs, which represented 88% of LAFs from across the country. The event was funded by Natural England but very much led by the LAFs and chaired independently by Steve Scoffin, who had recently stood down as Vice Chair of County Durham LAF. The majority of workshops and talks were led by LAF members and supported by Regional Coordinators and Natural England staff. Many thanks to the LAF members who ran the workshops, to the Regional Coordinators for helping to put the event together, to the speakers from Natural England and Defra, and to Steve for keeping everyone in order and on time.

### Follow up from the Event:

The wealth of information generated from the conference - including a record of the workshops - can be found on the Huddle workspace and the [Natural England website](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/7685821) and should help to feed continuing discussions. The workshop themes included: benefits to health; working with the planning system; dealing with funding cuts; green infrastructure and open access. We are trialling the use of Huddle Whiteboards to encourage the sharing of good practice in these and other specific themes. Feedback from delegates was largely positive and all of the following points have been noted for future events.

- Strong LAF involvement in designing the event was highly valued. The networking opportunities were particularly welcomed by delegates; although, as several said, there is never enough time!
- It was felt that some of the logistics, such as catering, could have been more streamlined, more space was needed for the workshops, and bigger name badges would have been helpful.

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/7685821>

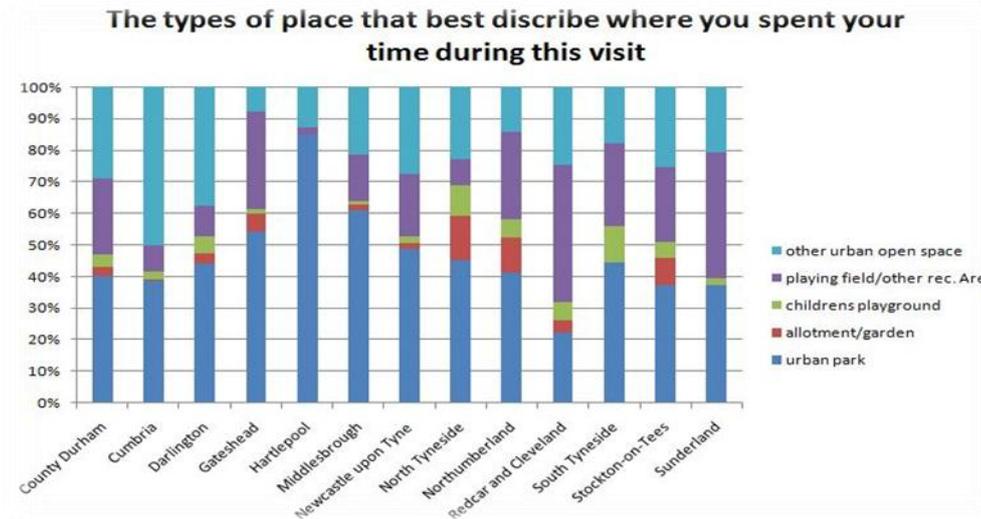
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## Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)

Those who attended the LAF conference were given a fascinating insight into MENE and for those who missed it, Stephen Herbert's presentation can be found on Huddle under conference feedback. Lots of LAFs have expressed an interest in making more use of MENE data in their work, and the good news is: plans are well in hand to make this easier.

An example of the data MENE can produce



Natural England is developing an online tool which will allow LAFs to produce a list of results from MENE, along with maps of where visits are against demographic variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status etc. In addition it may be possible to provide a brief overview of the headline findings on environmental engagement within a LAF, complete with tables, charts, maps and text. The tool will be free to use and will be updated annually. When launched later this year it will include the four year's data collected to date. Watch this space for further update

## Durham Dedication

(by Jim Milner, Lead Advisor, Natural England, Access Local Delivery Team)

Following a request from the County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF), Durham County Council agreed to dedicate two pieces of land as open access.

Cllr Neil Foster, said: "We're delighted to dedicate this land as open access so that residents have the freedom to enjoy more of the beautiful scenery that County Durham provides. I look forward to the council and the Local Access Forum continuing to work together for the benefit of the people of County Durham."

Geoff Hughes, Chair of the County Durham Local Access Forum, said: "The County Durham Local Access Forum welcomes the decision of the county council to dedicate two areas of land, one here at Waldridge Fell and the other at South Moor, for open access. Both areas adjoin land that already has open access and this decision will ensure that residents and visitors to County Durham alike will be able to enjoy both these areas for the foreseeable future.

"The LAF has been asking the council to take this action and we are pleased that

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they have now seen the benefits that will accrue. We hope that other landowners will now follow the lead of the council and dedicate suitable land for open access, and that the council themselves will regard this as only a start. Already Natural England have a programme of dedicating their nature reserves. We would be pleased to discuss the benefits of dedication with other landowners.”



## Working with Paths for Communities

(By Jim Stabler, Access Development Officer for Shropshire County Council)

Shropshire has found that LAF involvement in Paths for Communities (P4C) schemes has been essential from the outset. Potential projects were put forward at LAF meetings and one of the members of the LAF was nominated as a champion for the scheme. The person nominated was one with a particular interest in the project or detailed experience in the area of access concerned. The nominated champion explored the potential project in more detail and gave a presentation at the next LAF meeting. If the LAF liked the project and considered it feasible then it was endorsed for development.

The champion then became involved in the writing of the bid application and provided regular updates on progress at subsequent LAF meetings. This procedure ensured every project was given the full support of the LAF from inception to completion.

## South East Conference

(by Jonathan Clark, Strategic Access Advisor, Buckinghamshire County Council)

Seven speakers and fifty delegates attended the South East Regional LAF conference on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013 in London. Sarah Slade, from the CLA, outlined from their paper: '*The Right Way Forward: The CLA's common Sense approach to accessing the countryside 2012*'. An excellent keynote speaker, Sarah was invited to try and redress the balance towards more speakers representing the farming and landowning community and reflected a concern that local access issues were being discussed without their input.

Richard Brooks from the MOD, outlined the varied and often unique access issues encountered on some of the vast expanses of MOD land - including visitors that carry away rather dangerous souvenirs from their visits! Andrew Kerry-Bedell, from 'Mobi-Scan', then described a range of technologies available, using on-site QR codes,

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that can help to improve access information.

The afternoon was taken up with two advocates of cycling access. Bob Damper, a LAF member from the South Downs National Park, outlined the stark difference between the level of cycling access enjoyed in the South Downs National Park and opposition, by some groups, to the development of cycling access in the New Forest. Sara Randle of the CTC, spoke about plans to encourage greater access to market towns and stations in the Chilterns. This included Berkhamstead, hence attendance from Herts LAF, Eastern Region. Sara's enthusiasm was infectious; although, horse riders reminded delegates of the need for cyclists to be aware of the sensitivity and skittishness of horses. A plea was made for a speaker from the horse riding community at next years conference.

Kevin Haugh, Natural England, emphasised Natural England's remit to protect the natural environment. He went on to speak about changes to delivery within access and engagement and how Natural England, Defra, Local Authorities and LAFs need to understand each other's roles. Finally, Adam Wallace – also from Natural England - outlined progress on the formation of Local Nature Partnerships and spoke of the importance of LAF involvement.

It is hoped LAF members and Officers had an enjoyable day.

## LAF Survey

In March 2013 Natural England surveyed LAF Chairs and Secretaries to obtain an insight into how effective we have been in supporting LAFs work. We received a fantastic response with seventy eight questionnaires completed. The results are summarised in the attached report, which can also be found on Huddle. The information it contains will help us to prioritise our support for LAFs in 2013.

## Huddle Highlights

Of the wide ranging discussions on Huddle the one that has caught our eye this month is the slide show from Dave Allen of Worcester LAF. The presentation strongly backs the principle of least restrictive option and has some very good and practical examples of access infrastructure. Natural England would not support everything in the presentation and in particular the recommendation that some bridleways are closed for part of the year in poor weather - a suggestion that respondents to the discussion on Huddle have also challenged very robustly.

The presentation demonstrates the value of LAFs gathering and sharing good practice and we are using some of the slides to brief staff in Natural England that work on land management schemes (Higher Level Stewardship etc) about what to look out for in good access infrastructure. If you are a member you can find the discussion thread on Huddle [here](#) and join the debate.

## Huddle Tips

**(by Rob Leek, Lead Advisor, Natural England, Access and Rights of Way Delivery)**

For those not familiar with it, the LAF Huddle Workspace is an online internet resource for LAF members which includes a discussion forum, bulletin boards (whiteboards), calendar and document library. Here are some tips to try and help you get more out of it:

- **Email notifications** – when alerting other Huddle members to new content, try to only notify those relevant (e.g. members from a particular region). To unsubscribe from an email alert, reply to one of the Huddle notification emails,

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delete the 'subject' line and put UNSUBSCRIBE instead before you send.

- **Discussions** – when posting please be succinct, stay 'on subject' and try to keep posts short and easy to follow.
- **Links** – when posting information to Huddle you can include hyperlinks to other relevant areas of the workspace (discussions, documents, whiteboards). Right-click on the file/whiteboard/discussion you would like to link to and select 'copy shortcut' or 'copy link location'. Then right-click paste this into your text.
- **Easy Access** – you can access the Huddle from any internet enabled computer – just type *defra.huddle.net* in the web browser's address field and hit 'return'. There's also free, easy to use Huddle apps available for many smartphones and also the iPad.
- **Search** – the search facility in Huddle (click 'Search' at the top of the screen) is quick and easy to use and searches all the content in all areas of the workspace apart from the 'People' section.
- **Guidance** – in the 'Guidance/FAQs' folder in the 'Files' section there are numerous guides to help with using Huddle including 2 (soon to be updated) introductory videos. Huddle's own 'Help' section (available by clicking 'Help' at the top of the screen) is also very comprehensive.
- **Join in** - if any LAF member would like to join Huddle, please contact Regional Coordinator or [Rob Leek](#) , who will arrange access.

Contact [Rob Leek](#) with suggestions ideas or feedback.

