

Ladder stile on Hadrian's Wall National Trail

LAF NEWS

Quarter 2 2013/14

Issue 2

Welcome

Welcome to our second LAF News, and what an exciting edition it is. A lot of energy went into producing the 2011/12 Annual Report, capturing the breadth of LAF activity, and providing an opportunity to showcase LAF achievements. The hard work has paid off and I'm delighted that we are able to publish a response to the Annual Report from the Minister, Richard Benyon. Thanks to all of you who made this happen, and I hope it will provide encouragement and impetus for us to do even better next time! You'll find a reminder later in this newsletter.

We are keen for the LAF family to work together, sharing ideas and good practice, so I'm delighted that LAF members have contributed so many interesting articles to this edition. We've also set up over 50 Whiteboard Discussions on Huddle where you can learn from and share with other LAF colleagues on topics ranging from 'Unsurfaced Roads' to 'Wind Farms'; from 'Health Agenda' to 'Public Consultations'.

I hope you enjoy this edition of LAF News, with articles on LEPs, Mountain Bikes, Rural Policing, Good Practice, Measuring Effectiveness, Regional Conferences, Annual Reporting, and last but not least, an introduction to some of your Natural England colleagues! And don't forget, we need to hear from you. If you have any thoughts on the newsletter, or articles to contribute, please let us know.

Martin Shaw
Senior Advisor, LAF and Paths for Communities

In this issue...

Letter from the Minister
Local Enterprise Partnerships - LEPs
LAFs RoWIPs and Mountain Biking
LAFs & Rural Policing
Making a Difference
Measuring Effectiveness
SW Regional Conference
LAF Annual Reporting
Meet the NE team

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Ministers Letter to the LAF



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Local Access Forum Coordinators

3 September 2013

From Richard Benyon MP

Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries

Dear Chair

I would like to thank you for your work and achievements during the period of April 2011 to March 2012 in providing a local level body of expertise on public access and outdoor recreation issues.

The annual report by Natural England summarises this range of achievements including good partnership working on Coastal Access Paths, proactive working on the Pennine Bridleway, value for money use of a budget for countryside access improvements, and assurances of a better deal for access and rights of way along the HS2 line.

The Government recognises the important role of the Forums in contributing to improvements to greenspace, open access and connecting routes. These improvements contribute to local economic growth as well as the health and wellbeing of the population by attracting visitors to explore the landscapes, wildlife and heritage in an area. I also welcome your contribution to the successful delivery of the Paths for Communities scheme which has awarded 28 projects aimed at improving the network of public rights of way. In order to make the most of your expertise in these and other areas I would encourage you and your members to continue to develop relationships with Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships, and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

I look forward to hearing about the continued achievements of LAFs in the future.

Yours sincerely

Richard Benyon

RICHARD BENYON MP

Local Enterprise Partnerships - LEPs

Richard Benyon's letter to LAFs encourages you to develop relations with Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Boards. Many of you are doing this and building good relationships but you may still welcome this quick reminder about LEPs and what they are being asked to do.

The Government attaches importance to local solutions for local growth and encourages local authorities to set up partnerships with the business community to guide economic growth in their area. In England, 39 LEPs were established and have been running for a couple of years now. You can find out more about your local LEP through this interactive webpage.

Links

Huddle specific links

Minister's Letter to LAF

You can find out more about your local LEP by through this interactive webpage www.lepnetwork.org.uk/

Earlier this year LEPs were given a significant responsibility to design and deliver strategies on how to use the EU Structural and Investment funds in England for 2014-2020. They are charged with preparing a Growth Programme Strategy to set out plans with the first drafts expected by 7th October and final versions prepared by January. So as this newsletter is circulated the first drafts will be either in the very final stages of preparation or already submitted. They will be assessed by panels set up by the department for Business, Innovation and Skills and some of the funds must be spent in rural areas, by Defra Rural Development Teams.

Despite this first stage being well underway, there should be opportunities to continue to shape these strategic plans and to provide examples of the way improvements to access infrastructure can make big improvements to the lives of people bringing a range of economic and social benefits. The sort of projects that have been funded by Paths for Communities provide excellent examples – see last newsletter - of the sort of things that can be achieved with community involvement at the heart of all projects. This can be supported by MENE data to provide facts and figures about how people visit and engage with the outdoors.

One way into your LEPs is through the Local Nature Partnerships, which have been active in prompting discussion about projects to improve the natural environment and people's enjoyment of it. Joining up will add strength and a direct route into influencing LEP plans.

If you have news of how you are working with a LEP, through the LNP or directly, it would be good to hear from you so that we can share that experience on Huddle or through the next newsletter.

Wendy Thompson
Principle Adviser, Natural England

LAFs, RoWIPs and Mountain Biking

The first mountain bikes arrived in the UK during the mid-1980s and were, for many years, regarded as a threat to the status quo by landowners and traditional users. This unease settled into grumbles rather than outright opposition – and, nearly 30 years later, cycling off-road in the countryside is receiving an increasingly warm welcome for its contribution to the national health and tourism agendas. But is the rights of way network any more suitable for mountain bikers now than it was in the mid-1980s?

A look at the destinations for mountain bikers and families wishing for traffic-free cycling provides the answer - they have voted with their pedals and migrated en masse to Forestry Commission trails and railtrails.

CTC, the national cycling charity, is delighted that these facilities are so well appreciated by the cycling community, but also recognises that the potential of the rights of way network for cyclists has yet to be realised. It

Links

[Paths for Communities Newsletter](#)

[GOV.UK web pages about LEP inc links to links to further information](#)



LAF News

is therefore keen that cyclists and others engage with the network to help improve and promote its use for cycling.

A glance at CTC's website reveals how the charity feels that this should be achieved, with comprehensive advice on how to get involved with Local Access Forums (LAFs) and Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs), together with suggested actions.

Colin Palmer, CTC Rights of Way Adviser

LAFs and rural policing

The two Lincolnshire LAFs (Mid Lincolnshire LAF, and South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF) held a joint meeting in April for a presentation by and discussion with P.C. Nick Willey, Rural Crimes Officer, Lincolnshire Police.

P.C. Willey's post was originally created to tackle the widespread problem of illegal hare coursing, which can often be linked to other criminal activity. The post has developed to cover these, such as thefts of farm machinery. An important part of the post is gathering information and coordinating response over the county and with neighbouring forces.

We explained our problems: particularly damage by illegal use of motor vehicles with particular reference to the section of Sewstern Lane which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. These types of problem were a new to the officer, and he showed a keen interest. A productive discussion followed, from which the following points emerged:

The police need the public to record and report incidents to enable them to spot patterns of activity and identify "hotspots". The use of cameras and phone-cameras by the public was welcomed, but if appropriate people need to be willing to give statements. P.S Willey emphasized the importance of getting an incident number when reporting incidents, not least because only this ensures it will be entered into the data system.

Members with connections to national organizations passed on their knowledge of successful approaches taken by the police in other regions, which P.C. Willey was interested to explore more fully.

It had been a very useful meeting for both sides. There was an obvious fit with our concerns and the wider issues of rural crime, not least the value of the public's eyes and ears, if they will report illegal or suspicious activity, but also the need to have someone who not only is aware of this area of law, but is looking at the data with a view to spot the patterns and hot-spots. Although not mentioned, the direct contact with a named officer who shows interest and enthusiasm for the task, and had gained an understanding of the issues, raised ones feeling that reporting is worthwhile.

Chris Padley, Mid-Lincolnshire LAF

Links

Find the CTC views at

[Local Access Forums - CTC View](#)

[Rights of way Improvement Plans - CTC View](#)

Making a Difference

Many LAFs will find that whilst their existence is enshrined in law, their Appointing Authority may not be fully aware of their presence and the work that they do. For a LAF to be effective two things need to be in place - full and active membership, and knowledge of the important role that the LAF plays in local decision making. Other suggestions are as follows:

Hold regular meetings: whilst lots can go on between, meetings serve as a good time to brief others on current work and for presentations from those that may benefit from LAF expertise. Invite local councillors, especially cabinet members, as well as Officers from departments including Highways and Planning. Also, consider inviting potential members.

Membership should be broad and varied and those with very narrow interests discouraged. The Ramblers are well supported and The British Horse Society have local access officers who are usually trained in Highway Law up to and including Public Enquiry level. Having members that are willing to champion a specific area or run projects - a P4C bid for example - are a real bonus. Specialities could include: planning applications, landowner liaison, disability and health issues, volunteer working and ROW clearance parties. Recruitment through word of mouth often works well.

Develop and maintain a good relationship with at least one rights of way officer. This is vital.

Maintain focus on LAF core aims: "I always begin LAF meetings with a reminder of the LAF aims as defined by s94 CROW 2000," comments Anthony Francis-Jones Chair of the Telford and Wrekin LAF. "This helps all of us focus our thoughts on broader issues and supports our policy of multi-user access wherever possible."

Get your LAF known locally: talk to members of the Appointing Authority (Planning, Legal, RoW etc.), comment on planning applications both on the planning website and at Plans Board, and liaise with local developers for improved access. Be proactive and take part in all consultations that could involve access to open spaces. Success will breed success and the LAF will be known locally as the main place to go for advice and help from a group of experienced users.

Consider using a logo for your LAF headed paper – branding is important and can give a LAF identity. It is also important that the LAF stays 'on message'. Whilst robust discussion is welcomed and views can differ, to remain respected locally the LAF must be seen to operate in a cohesive rather than disparate manner.

Your LAF can really make a difference!

Anthony Francis-Jones
Chairman, Telford and Wrekin LAF

Measuring Effectiveness

The Guidance on Local Access Forums in England is an important document. Section 3.9 on Measuring Effectiveness incorporates some critical yet challenging guidance on ensuring LAFs make a positive contribution. The paragraphs in the guidance are as follows:



3.9.1. Appointing authorities and forum members will want to ensure that time invested in their forums is worthwhile and that advice makes a positive contribution to decisions affecting the local area.

Forums should therefore consider and agree criteria against which to measure their effectiveness (possible measures might be the amount, relevance, range of advice given; feedback from section 94(4) bodies; assessments of where advice has made a difference). This will help forums to improve their effectiveness and make appropriate adjustments where necessary. The information can also be used in preparing the annual report.

3.9.2. As the body that is likely to be the main recipient of forum advice, the appointing authority(ies) are encouraged to assist forums in developing relevant and meaningful criteria which suit the local circumstances.

The Annual Review Form offers the opportunity to record important data on involvement in a number of subject areas and to give examples of three key pieces of advice. Measuring the effectiveness of that advice is more demanding. Reasons for this are lack of feedback from the bodies that LAFs advise (section 94(4) bodies); time delays between giving advice and subsequent changes in policy; and trying to give an objective assessment of how important the advice has been in making a difference. So what can LAFs do to try and fulfil section 3.9 of the Guidance?

LAFs should ensure how to measure effectiveness is discussed with the appointing authority.

Seek feedback on the advice the LAF has given. Sometimes this might mean going through a summary of responses and proposed changes in order to identify whether there has been a change due to comments the LAF has made. Where the LAF has made a difference, even in a small way, make sure this is recorded and that all members and the appointing authority know. Think about devising a ranking system so that the influence of any advice can be measured, for example, a difference that is 'very significant', 'significant', 'minimal', or 'no difference'. This might also help to focus LAF activity in certain areas where it has more impact.

Member morale and commitment is greatly enhanced when they feel the work they have put in is making a significant difference to access provision or policy.

Hilary Winter
Forum Officer, Devon Countryside Access Forum
Regional Coordinator, SW Region

LAF News

South West Regional Conference March 2013

Members from the twelve LAFs across the region enjoyed a day at Dartmoor National Park offices with a specific theme of dog management. Dog Control Orders and other dog issues are matters which concern LAFs yet views are frequently polarised.

The region was fortunate to have Stephen Jenkinson as the key presenter for the day. Stephen is an independent consultant to such bodies as the Forestry Commission, local authorities and Natural England and also the Access Adviser to the Kennel Club. There was no doubting Stephen's enthusiasm for dogs but at the same time his key message was ensuring dogs, and their owners, learn how to share space with other access users. He gave several highly informative and relevant presentations on the following subjects:

- Dogs and their owners;
- What the law can and cannot achieve;
- Principles of good practice;
- Integrated management;
- The role of LAFs in promoting good practice.

Illustrated with case examples, the presentations and discussions focussed LAF members' attention on what could be achieved when access sites, in both urban and rural areas, were well managed.



Andrew Watson, Head of Access, Recreation and Estates at Dartmoor National Park Authority, gave a further presentation on a specific educational campaign, PAWS on Dartmoor, targeted at dog owners. The aim was to promote good dog management in order to reduce the impact of uncontrolled dogs on livestock and conservation objectives.

Hilary Winter
Regional Coordinator, SW

Dog Update (MENE)

The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment report for year 4, March 2012 – February 2013, published at the end of July indicates just how important dog walking is for health and how dog management issues should be explored more fully.

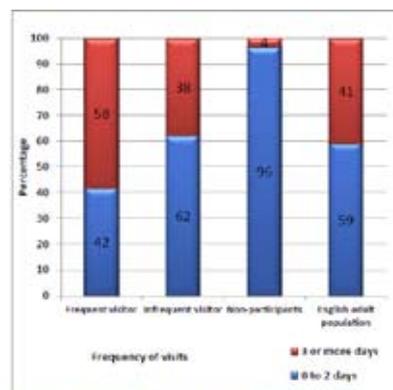


Figure 7: Number of days in the last week Wiltshire residents undertook 30 minutes of more of physical

Links



The full report with details of useful publications can be found on Huddle or by e-mailing me at hilary.winter@devon.gov.uk

A few key facts from the MENE report (England):

58% of visits to the countryside involved walking with a dog;
45% of visits to coastal destinations involved walking with a dog;
1.4 billion visits to the natural environment, by far the top activity, were with a dog;
47% of people went out to exercise their dog, the top motivating factor.

As discussed at the SW LAF Conference, LAFs have an important role to play in identifying significant and sustained problems, developing consistent and integrated approaches and looking at the least restrictive and enforceable approaches to achieve the desired solutions. This may mean responding to Dog Control Order consultations or taking a proactive approach to dog management on particular sites.

Hilary Winter
Regional Coordinator, SW

Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum working with MENE

The CAF has worked on developing a local statistical evidence base, using MENE data. The objective has been to produce a “single version of the truth” upon which policy decisions can be made based on the concept in Wiltshire’s “Joint Strategic Assessment” initiative. The CAF considers that for its advice to be influential it must adhere to the same quantitative rigour that the Authority adopts towards its other decision making processes. Initial analysis has focused on public health outcomes and the level of walking generally throughout Wiltshire and Swindon. The aim of the first study carried out by the CAF was to support the proposition that some transfer of funding takes place from the health budget to pay for infrastructure improvements in the rights of way network, particularly in areas of highest health inequality.

The CAF has also worked in partnership with the ROWIP officer to include robust data in the new emerging ROWIP, as illustrated by one of the graphs based on MENE in the ROWIP consultation draft.

Jane Yates
Lead Advisor

LAF Annual Reporting

A few months ago the National LAF Annual Report for the financial year 2011-12 was produced by Natural England and submitted to Defra and earlier this month the Minister Richard Benyon sent a letter in response. This national report was only able to be produced due to the LAFs completing and submitting their annual report proformas to Natural England in time for them to be included.

[MENE on NE's website](#)

LAF News

This year Natural England is asking all of the LAFs to complete and submit the new Annual Review Form for the reporting year of April 2012 – March 2013 by 31st October submission deadline. They can be submitted either by email to Rob Leek / Regional Coordinator or uploaded straight to Huddle with an alert to Rob and the Regional Coordinator so they know that it's there and can log its submission.

Once all the Annual Review Forms have been collected, using the information from them, each Regional Coordinator will complete a Regional Report Form and will submit this to Natural England by 30th November. Natural England will then use all these forms plus other information collected from the reporting year - such as the LAF Survey Results and the feedback from the LAF Conference - and produce the 2012-13 LAF National Annual Report for submission to Defra.

If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback about any part of the LAF annual reporting process, please contact Rob Leek.

Rob Leek, Lead Advisor

Who's Who in Natural England

Wendy Thompson is a Natural England Principal responsible for leading two national teams responsible for local level access and engagement projects across England. The work of the two teams is wide ranging and includes Paths for Communities, working with Local Access Forums, the Countryside Code and associated public advice, public engagement on National Nature Reserves, local advice on Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves and seeking opportunities to improve access through European funds such as the Common Agricultural Policy and Growth Programme. Previously she has worked on Public Rights of Way legislation and in particular the guidance on ROWIPs and options to complete the definitive map, as well as within research teams focusing on day visit surveys, Greenspace and providing online information about enjoying the outdoors. Wendy is a long standing and active member of the Countryside Recreation Network which she chaired between 2010-2012. Out of work her interests include walking, cycling and running; gardening and relaxing with a film or a good novel.



Links

[LAF 2011 - 12 National Annual Report](#)

[LAF 2012 - 13 National Conference feedback](#)

Huddle specific links

[Ministers Letter to LAF](#)

[Annual review reporting form](#)

[Huddle filestore for annual reviews](#)



Martin Shaw is based in Newcastle upon Tyne and has worked closely with LAFs for a number of years. Since April 2012 he has been the Senior Advisor steering Natural England's strategic involvement with LAFs nationally. He played a key role in setting up the Paths for Communities Grant Programme and leads its Natural England Delivery Team. Previous to this Martin headed up the Walking for Health Programme in the North East and has had many years involvement in countryside management and access issues,

particularly in the urban fringe. Outside of work he enjoys travel, countryside walks and cooking anything that involves the use of chilli!

Rob Leek has been the National LAF Lead Adviser since April 2012 though previously worked with LAFs in the West of England area of the South West and on Huddle development in his role as a People and Partnerships adviser. Previous to this he worked regionally on Walking for Health and before that on the Countryside Agency's Local Heritage Initiative scheme both regionally and nationally. His main outside work interests are music making/playing and looking after his 3 year old daughter.



Next month we will introduce you to the local delivery officers!



Sycamore Gap Hadrian's Wall National Trail

Contact us

enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk