



Hertfordshire Local Access Forum
Notes from informal meeting held via Zoom,
to replace 66th public meeting.



10th June 2020

LAF Members: Liddy Lawrence (Chair) **LL**, Diana Collingridge **DC**, Russell Huffer **RH**,
Brian Worrell **BW**, Debbie Pearlman-Hougie **DPH**, Paul Christian **PC**,
Bianca Badham **BB**, Rosalind David **RD**.

HCC Officers: Richard Cuthbert **RC**

Apologies: Tony Bradford **TB**

1. COVID 19 HCC CROW updates

- **Herts Health Walks CANCELLED.** Plans underway to restart HHW activity with social distancing. Protection for members is priority, due to the number of shielding attendees. Risk assessments will be required.
- **Communities & Access teams** - joint working to support inspection of unofficial path closures, fault repots etc. Responses to reports still ongoing. Site inspections being undertaken with social distancing. Discussions / negotiations over the reopening of closed paths constantly underway, most of whom are obliging. Some small, but genuine concerns, e.g. for shielding residents. Key stakeholder discussions underway.
- **Land Management team** - continuing to work at home on land management plans. Weston Hills plan in development.
- **Definitive Map & Enforcement Team** - All working from home. Cases being brought forward where they can, but progress on many is prevented by the need to post site notices & notices at BC/DC offices. Early lockdown measures could have brought higher local exposure to site notices, due more locals using local network, but also meant user group reps couldn't travel to access affected paths. Easing of lockdown has now allowed officers to complete site visits, however no case can be taken further than the Notices stage at this point. The team's performance indicator due end of June is expected to be severely disrupted. Pushing cases forward without full advertising / consultation processes brings a risk, as notices and orders are usually displayed in BC/DC offices and at Co.Hall. For now, these can only be displayed on the HCC website, this is not in complete adherence to regulations.
- **Planning teams.** Still receiving PAs through, despite restrictions. Masterplans coming forward for North of Harlow / Eastwick & Gilston area (called 'Harlow Garden Town'). Discussions w/r to North of Baldock large scheme, Hitchin College smaller housing area and others, all in discussion.

- **Part-time officers' hours** - Jeremy Clark (CRoW Tree Officer) offering unused work hours through CC redeployment hub. Heidi Hutton (Active Travel Officer) dealing with plans and multi-user active travel routes, with some successful schemes delivered already.
- **LAF summer fieldtrip:** Could be possible but unsure. Concerns over those shielding not being able to attend. **RC** to assess and feed-back.
- **Overall Covid-19 situation:** Case progress slower. Email & online communication slows processes, despite MS teams really helping.

2. LAF Concerns

- **Fly tipping concerns.** CRoW Enforcement Officer, Jamie Bartlett, deals with fly-tipping issues with all the Access Projects Officers. Rise in cases being reported and hotspots remain in certain areas. Path entrances often targeted, particularly in quiet rural areas not overlooked. More contact with farmers. Overall an increase of cases, alongside larger amounts of waste fly-tipped, as a result of Covid-19 HWRC opening restrictions. Beginning to decrease due to reopening of HWRCs.
- **Sheep worrying concerns.** Not aware of cases in Herts however being reported in Essex.
- **Trespassing concerns.** There is a new generation of footpath user, bringing issues w/r to public behaviour in countryside, lack of knowledge etc. Walkers & cyclists can cause damage through compaction to fields only recently drilled, by straying off PRoW. Farmers face the difficult choice of constant confrontation or turning a blind eye. Farmers continuously required to police these issues. LAs all attempting to do their bit however this outdoor recreational behaviour is being reported as prevalent nationwide.
- **User groups' concerns.** Large groups can be confrontational. Mixture of generations having different behaviour patterns. Protection concerns over the elderly and vulnerable, safety for everyone a struggle. Numbers of mountain bikers rising, with attitudes of users can be very dismissive and hostile, landowners and even army has to deal with this.
- **Mixture of cultures concerns.** What is the norm to some individuals is not for others, e.g. fishing for food rather than for recreation.
- **Issues of post-lockdown concerns.** Will these adverse behaviours continue post-lockdown? Will increased user numbers become the norm? Or will people venture further afield once restrictions are relieved further?
- **Impacts on farming & future concerns.** Current higher levels of impacts are especially concerning for farms on urban fringes. Review of environmental land management schemes and new regulations raises questions over whether farmers will

select access as a public good? Current access issues could deter landowners from taking this route.

3. Potential Solutions

- **DEFRA revised Countryside Code:** Shorter version now includes advice, requests for countryside respect and sticking to footpaths. Awareness of this new Covid-19 specific code is the key to influencing / changing behaviour.
- **Public Signs:** Collect & assess signs and information being used from around the country, to see if any would better inform the public.
- **Education in schools:** Education, from primary age groups upwards, is key to influencing the behaviour of new generations. Duke of Edinburgh Awards good way to do this with secondary age groups. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has materials for this. New Forest resource packs good example.
- **Social media:** LAF twitter / Facebook accounts? Collaborate with larger groups who already have a sustained platform? These types of accounts require time and effort to update daily. Possible collaboration with CMS pages. Instagram a good way of getting through to younger generation.
- **Leaflets / information packs:** needed for public, schools etc
- **Engagement with groups:** Natural England, DEFRA, local community groups, Ramblers, NFU, Wildlife Trusts.
- **Local / neighbourhood plans:** need to highlight issues of outdoor recreation more, and cover greenspace access & management.

4. **Date and time of next meeting:** 16th Sept 2020 - venue to be confirmed.

Resources:

DEFRA revised Countryside Code –
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=848907328918645>

NFU advice on RoW –
<https://www.nfuonline.com/news/coronavirus-updates-and-advice/coronavirus-news/coronavirus-guidance-on-public-rights-of-way/> -

Gov.uk video on visiting the countryside during lockdown restrictions –
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bd9fNfvEbuo&feature=emb_title

Ordnance Survey bulletin on Countryside Code –
<https://getoutside.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/guides/the-countryside-code/>

Countryfile bulletin 'Five minute guide to the Countryside Code' –
<https://www.countryfile.com/how-to/your-five-minute-guide-to-the-countryside-code/>

Countryside Online video on visiting countryside during COVID19 –
<https://www.countrysideonline.co.uk/care-for-the-countryside/coronavirus-and-the-countryside/>

News article (Norwich) requesting Countryside Code to be taught in schools following reports of anti-social lockdown behaviour –

<https://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/news/cla-wants-countryside-code-taught-in-schools-1-6702022>

News Article (Yorkshire) requesting Countryside Code to be taught in schools following reports of anti-social lockdown behaviour –

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/country-and-farming/rural-organisation-cla-write-education-minister-gavin-willamson-calling-countryside-code-be-taught-schools-2886383>

Duke of Edinburgh Award 5 ways to stick to the Countryside Code –

<https://www.dofe.org/thelatest/5ways-countrysidecode/>