

# Item 15

## Speaking up - on Rights of Way and Countryside Access



### Leicestershire Local Access Forum

2014 Update

Local Access Forums (LAFs) are independent advisory bodies that bring together the different interests involved with public rights of way and countryside access. This includes farmers, property owners, conservationists, local councils and users such as walkers and riders. LAFs were set up as statutory bodies as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, and exist to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways.

Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities, on access issues in respect of land use planning matters. The Secretary of State advised that in particular forums were to focus on the impact and options for minimising possible adverse effects of planning policies and development proposals, in respect of future public access to land. Forums are tasked with identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new developments.

### During 2013-14 the Leicestershire Forum has ...

#### 1. Raised rights of way issues in major planning & development schemes

The Forum has submitted comments to the Planning authorities on major planning schemes and large development projects, and engaged directly with the developers where appropriate.

#### 2. Contributed to Local Plans

The Forum has contributed to and commented on the plans being produced by the District Councils

#### 3. Championed new public access and unprotected 'lost' rights of way

- **Unrecorded, and therefore unprotected, and 'lost' historic rights of way.** The Forum has a sub-group to focus its own efforts and coordinate the work of other groups on this to avoid duplication of effort.
- **New public access on Leicestershire County Council farmland.** As farm tenancies become due for renewal the Forum is advising on possible creation of new rights of way.
- **End of Government grant-aided permissive paths** The Forum encourages Parish Councils to talk to local farmers seeking retention of permissive paths when grant schemes come to an end, particularly in places where the access delivers tangible public benefits.

#### 4. Monitored County Council work on public rights of way and access

- **Proposed path diversions and revisions** - The Forum monitors and advises on rights of way that are being diverted, deleted or added to the Definitive Map.
- **Reviewing paths crossing railway tracks** - Network Rail's project to provide alternatives to rights of way level crossings is being examined and commented on. This includes site visits and suggesting solutions.

#### 5. Engaged with other providers of countryside access opportunities

The Forum is actively interested in country parks and access provided by local authorities, charities and businesses – and in projects that encourage people to explore the countryside. It has representatives at or observers on the Charnwood Forest Regional Park Steering Group, Midlands Road Users and Environment Committee, North West Leicestershire DC Cycle Strategy Group - Leicestershire Parks, Open Spaces and Countryside Group - Landscape Partnership Board - Heart of the Forest Forum, Access and Connectivity sub-group - Leicestershire Together, Natural and Historic Environment Partnership - National Forest Access & Recreation Group - River Soar and Grand Union Canal Group.

## 6. Commented on national and local government policy proposals

Responding to changing legislation and regulations is a key role. The Forum has commented to the relevant UK Government consultations about numerous matters including changing the legal framework for public rights of way; the Impacts and possible opportunities presented by the High Speed 2 proposed rail line; the proposed major transport hub by East Midlands Airport and possible changes to farm subsidies.

## OTHER ISSUES

The Forum is carrying out a detailed review of all **open access land** in the county. It is checking on signage, safety and access adequacy and is contacting the landowners where there are perceived shortcomings and where constructive suggestions are forthcoming. When the landowners have had chance to respond and correct any deficiencies the reports will go to the County council as the Access Authority. Teams of Forum members are going out to one site each month and whilst a time consuming process is it both interesting and rewarding.



In addition to the review and inspection we are carrying out for the Authority we are looking for suggestions as to how sites can be better promoted and enhanced and how paths can be created within these areas to improve the overall network of rights of way. To date we have visited Billa Barra and Altar Stones near Markfield; Charnwood Lodge and Loughborough Meadows, with Burrough Hill and Burbage Common next in line.

Roy Denney, Forum Chairman

In 2012 **North West Leicestershire** District Council commissioned a **cycle strategy** document. The intent was to maximise the tourism, active travel and recreational cycling opportunities for residents and visitors to North West Leicestershire. The strategy was split into three parts. Part 1 which focused on the network in and around Coalville, part two which would cover Ashby de la Zouch and the final part 3 which would look at the Northern Parishes.

I represent the LAF on the Strategy Team, and am a keen off and on road cyclist living in the area.

Originally there was little cycling infrastructure in the area, but with funding in place and the completion of Part 1, many miles of new cycle ways have been provided which link residential, employment and tourist areas.

There's little doubt that the provision of these new facilities has encouraged more people to get out on their bikes, particularly those new to cycling.

We are working on the Ashby de la Zouch part and potential cycle routes have been identified. The next step is to obtain the necessary funding allowing the project to continue



Steve Palmer

I see my role on the LAF as largely to put the **farmer and land managers'** perspective, although I am a keen walker outside of my day job and my wife is a happy horse hacker. We all want to see improved access to the countryside and for more people to enjoy that, but not at the cost of farming and other rural businesses. As a result, for example, the LAF will look at public right of way diversions not only from an access angle but also taking into account the needs of farms and rural businesses.

The Forum has a committee looking at the situation with **roadside verges** around the county. As roads get ever busier we feel more use must be made of these to keep walkers and riders off the actual roads. There is a problem with drainage ditches cutting across them and a clutter of signs etc making their use problematical and we wish to create guidelines to progressively improve the situation

Vicky Allen

As Chairman of the Forum, I see one of our main functions, second only to giving advice to the local authorities, as being to advise users how to enjoy the rights of way network responsibly and to encourage the wider population to make use of it. This not only provides exercise, it can reduce their carbon footprint; can improve their health and general wellbeing and can boost the rural economies.

The Forum has proved very effective at bringing together people for diverse points of view and getting everybody to understand both sides of any situation.

Under guidance from the NFU and the Ramblers Association we have issued advice about walking in fields with cows in, especially with a dog. The comments of Alex Pyper, a member of the Forum, are very encouraging.

“As a landowner with footpaths crossing our fields I have noticed how well behaved **dog walkers** and their dogs have been lately. In two years I have not noticed one dog out of control.

Very satisfying and sheep much appreciate it!

As a horse rider and volunteer for the British Horse Society I do hear of confrontations between dogs and horses - not necessarily in Leicestershire - some resulting in injury to horse and rider.

When you encounter horse riders on public paths please be aware that your dog may react and become excited or aggressive which will alarm a horse and I see part of the LLAF role being to advise users of the network as to how to react in such situations. Always look ahead and be sure you can recall your dog quickly if necessary. If not, it would be advisable to keep it on a lead if you think you will encounter horses. If you know your dog may react to an approaching horse keep it under control, step aside and if necessary, call out and speak to the rider so they understand the situation and can halt or step aside as well.

Talking calmly will reassure both dog and horse and may brighten your day.”

Yet another area which the Forum has addressed is that of the **bus services and park and ride** provision. We invited the Sustainable Travel Manager at Leicestershire County Council to join us and discussed the issues in some detail.

“I joined the LAF some years ago now, thinking that, with my interest in the open air and background in passenger transport planning, I could help to improve links to, and around, the Leicestershire countryside for people from all backgrounds.

Car owners can use buses to access parts of the countryside they wouldn't normally reach. And pleasant, long walks are possible by catching one bus to your walk's starting point and returning from your finishing point on a different one. For example, Bradgate Park is possible by bus either via Anstey/Newtown Linford at one end or Cropston at the other. And there are many other examples.

As a LAF member, I've learned a lot about relevant laws and the type of issues we face in monitoring and (hopefully) improving the network of Rights Of Way (ROW) in Leicestershire.

I've been particularly concerned with promoting access by public transport (especially bus services) to the ROW network. This has been a long, slow process, with many hitches along the way, including service alterations, lack of multi operator integrated ticketing, etc. Another problem in many cases is the location of bus stops in areas near ROWs, often with very little standing space, no footpaths nearby and fast moving traffic to contend with (Nailstone Cross Roads and Woodlands Nurseries along the A447 being two examples of this).

But some progress is being made. The Leicester Flexi bus ticket has day and weekly versions, and is valid on 5 operators' buses in Central Leicestershire. It may be extended Countywide, and will be a big help to walkers if so.

Most major operators have their own Rover type tickets, which are cheaper than multi operator ones but only valid on their own services. And one or two have developed special offers in conjunction with local attractions.

Another big challenge is suitable publicity. As a regular bus user, I know that bus services in general are much better than they're often given credit for. But publicity for them is, at best, patchy, and often very poor or non-existent.

This needs urgent attention if these services are to realise their full potential in this respect. And that's something to work with the bus operators to sort out".

Terry Kirby

I Chair the LAFs Network Opportunities Committee which is working to enhance the network of rights of way. **Unrecorded public rights of way** relying on historic evidence have to be claimed by 2026, or will be permanently extinguished. The Deregulation Bill going through Parliament will agree the process and the LAF is gearing up for what will be a very time consuming task. If we feel we have sufficient evidence that a route should be recorded as a public rights of way we will submit a claim. Given the work involved in research and obtaining evidence, the most useful will be treated as a priority.

We also see our role as co-ordinating the work of all local organisations working on the project to ensure there is no duplication of effort. We are talking to the County Council and user groups to find out what records are available and in what format.

As farm tenancies become due for renewal the Forum is advising on possible creation of new rights of way. This year with the cooperation of the County Council one new footpath has been dedicated and a further area of land is being investigated to be made available for public access with a focus on access for the disabled. We have an ongoing dialogue with the County Council, district councils and Leicestershire and Rutland Sport promoting access for the less able.

John Law

Members of the forum serve for three years but can be invited to serve again. We have a mix of long serving members and more recent recruits. Long service encourages a level of knowledge and expertise which is useful but new blood introduces new ideas and fresh enthusiasm. Forum has four formal meetings a year, normally at County Hall in the early evening. It can open doors for you; in representing the Forum on partnership bodies I have extended my interest in ecology and the environment.

As peoples circumstances change some members have to drop out and we do have a **vacancy** at present so anybody at all interested is invited to contact us.

We do try and have a balance of interests on the Forum and at present the ethnic minorities and the less able are under represented. Members can elect to join further committees working on specific projects.

I have served as Chair for twelve years and am stepping down this year but am likely to stay involved at some level. It has been an interesting and rewarding exercise and if you are at all interested in rights of way and countryside access I commend the Forum to you.

Roy Denney

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## For more information ...

Web: [www.leicslaf.org.uk](http://www.leicslaf.org.uk) - the site includes meeting dates, past papers, and a list of members.

Email: [information@leicslaf.org.uk](mailto:information@leicslaf.org.uk)

Post: Leicestershire Local Access Forum, c/o TCAT, Room 700, County Hall, Glenfield, LE3 8RJ

The Forum is independent although the County Council appoints members and provides administrative support.