

Speaking up - on Rights of Way and Countryside Access



Leicestershire Local Access Forum

2013 Update

Local Access Forums are independent advisory bodies that bring together the different interests concerned with public rights of way and countryside access, including farmers property owners, conservationists, local councils, and users such as walkers and riders.

During 2012-3 the Access 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.

- **Bardon New Quarry** – this huge new quarry proposal is phased. The first development period now being implemented includes rights of way changes and some new routes originally proposed by the Forum.
- **Optimus Point, Glenfield** – discussions with developer Wilson Bowden have resulted in rights of way improvements being incorporated in the development proposals.

The Forum has also formally commented on:

- Blaby District Council's Open Spaces Policy and Local Development Framework;
- North West Leics District Council's Core Development Framework and Cycling Strategy;
- A Number of possible large housing developments including SUE at Lubbethorpe and Thurmaston/Hamilton
- Charnwood Borough Council's Thurmaston Regeneration Strategy about Watermead.

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

- **Unrecorded, and therefore unprotected, and 'lost' historic rights of way** (these vanish in 2026 unless put on the Definitive Map). The Forum has set-up a sub-group to focus its own efforts on this and help avoid duplication of effort by other groups actively concerned about this issue.
- **Charnwood Forest: Past Ways - Lost Ways - New Ways** including researching ancient paths - a Forum project proposal forming a significant part of the bid for lottery funds to create a Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership based on the Regional Park plans.
- **New public access on farmland** owned by Leicestershire County Council. As farm tenancies become due for renewal the Forum is advising on possible routes for new paths. This has included the creation of a new public footpath.
- **National Forest Way long distance trail** - The Forum has contributed ideas and practical help. The group and the partner organisations will be actively supporting the launch on May 17th 2014.
- **End of Government grant-aided permissive paths** The Forum highlighted this in 2012 and encourages Parish Councils to ask relevant local farmers if this access could be retained, particularly in places where the access delivers tangible public benefits.

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

- **Proposed path diversions and revisions** The Forum considers quarterly updates about Definitive Map rights of way that are being diverted, deleted or added.

- **Reviewing paths crossing railway tracks** Network Rail's project to provide alternatives to rights of way level crossings has been examined including on site visits.

The Forum has also received and commented on the following:

- updates from the County Council about: Rights of Way Management;
- Minerals and Waste Plan,
- Policy on installing Self-closing gates;
- Pathfinder – the County Council's project to identify and protect lost rights of way.

4. Engaged with other providers of countryside access opportunities

The Forum is actively interested in country parks and access provided by local authorities, charities and business – and in projects that encourage people to explore the countryside.

- **Bradgate Park Trust** The Forum had a briefing from the new Land Agent & Surveyor.
- **Beacon Hill Management Plan** was reviewed by the Forum who also had a site visit.
- **Duke of Edinburgh Awards** The Forum was given an overview of the Scheme.

5. 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:

- **Highways stopping-up and diversion orders** as done by local authorities.
- **Changing the Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way**
- **Impacts / benefits of the High Speed 2 proposed rail line including Station location.**

The Forum has also responded to national consultations about coastal access, Common Agricultural Policy reform, the management of public woodlands and improving health and well-being through physical exercise.

Looking ahead – priorities for 2014 include ...

... continuing the activities listed above. In addition to these the Forum will focus on ...

- The **impact of likely changes to local government & its funding** over the next 5 years.
- **Planned changes to rights of way law and the 2026 deadline** for saving lost and unrecorded historic routes. This may well mean local government needs more staff in this area, at least in the short term and will have to coordinate the efforts of volunteer help.
- **Monitoring the many large scale potential developments** - assessing the impacts on the rights of way networks and opportunities to enhance that network and the provision of adequate public transport links.
- **Developing volunteering partnerships** – to allow more people to get involved in encouraging and providing access opportunities.
- **Engaging other bodies with similar agendas** – including Forum representatives sent to the following:
 - Charnwood Forest Regional Park Steering Group and Landscape Partnership Board;
 - Heart of the Forest Forum;
 - Parks, Open Spaces and Countryside Group;
 - Canals & Waterways Trust/River Soar and Grand Union Canal Group;
 - National & Historic Environment Partnership;
 - Ashby Cycle Network Group;
 - National Forest Access & Recreation Group;
 - Midlands Road Users and Environment Committee;

For more information ...

Web: www.leicslaf.org.uk - the site includes meeting dates, past papers, and a list of members.

Email: 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.