

## **Response to Notes on JLAF Review and the way forward**

**Hilary Winter, Regional Coordinator, SW Region LAFs**

### **Comments on Ron's notes**

- **Audit of access**

This would be an excellent idea. I would fight shy of such an initiative in a large County but it is a possible and realistic expectation in JLAF. (South Hams District Council has recently developed a 'Special Places and Active Spaces' public space consultation and is attempting to build up an interactive website of different access provision with maps and details).

This could be time-consuming and the JLAF may wish to delegate to a dedicated working group to explore in detail. A comprehensive website of all access and health initiatives would be a valuable resource but you would need to consider who funds and keeps this up-to-date.

- **Funding**

As you rightly say, a complex area and it is difficult to obtain accurate and meaningful information. I think you would be right to concentrate on some specific areas. For example Best Performance Indicators for Rights of Way, recently published, show that 85.6% of Bristol's rights of way are 'easy to use' whereas Bath and North East Somerset has a figure of 54.3% and South Gloucestershire 47.8%. Questions could be asked as to how figures could be improved, what funding is directed towards rights of way maintenance and what priority is given to this area within overall budgets. Your Councillor member might be able to assist with this.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/issues/public/bv185data.pdf>

- **RoWIPs**

One of the areas I am keen on is how LAFs can contribute to the RoWIP as it evolves, particularly through Annual Business Plans. For example, the Devon forum held a working group meeting to assist the RoWIP Officer in developing a scoring system to compare potential rights of way improvements. The JLAF may wish to do something similar, or to highlight areas which are high priority either in terms of the type of improvement or geographically.

- **Representation on the LAF**

It would be useful to look at the composition of the JLAF and see whether it represents a range of interests. The JLAF website does not show members' interests. If you have not got representatives of disability groups, black and minority ethnic groups, young people, and those with water or sport interests it would be good to encourage such applicants in your next round of appointments. Other interests such as health, public transport or business might also be relevant. It may well be that Chris has already tried these avenues - unsuccessfully. Forum membership needs to broaden alongside its increasingly wide role and to be seen as inclusive. The National Parks, Plymouth and Torbay LAFs hold evening meetings which might encourage applicants.

- **Parish Councils**

Parish Councils have also become section (94) 4 bodies. You may wish to consider an article in a magazine, aimed at Parish Councillors. Does your local Community Council have such a publication? One way is to encourage PCs to look at including rights of way questions in their Parish Plan questionnaires which might then inform the RoWIP. I can supply details if required.

- **Structure of the LAF**

Having a Deputy to the Chair and Vice Chair is an excellent initiative. In many LAFs it is difficult to encourage other members to take the reins.

## **2. The way forward**

- **Guidance**

The Guidance, which could be out by the time of your meeting, will be useful. It will provide a 'touch stone' as to whether the JLAF is on target and covering the right areas of work. Bearing in mind the LAFs strategic role I think the following are key areas for the future:-

- The RoWIP and its implementation which might include resource needs.
- Local Development Framework documents – ensuring the JLAF is consulted and making sure rights of way, access and green space issues are adequately covered. This process is vital and gives the opportunity to advise strategically on the impact of development policies and opportunities to improve access.
- Inclusion of disadvantaged groups of society. I think the JLAF is well-positioned to do some useful work in this area and provide advice. This is an area not well-covered by SW LAFs.

- **New areas of work in the Guidance, particularly relevant to JLAF**

- Functional access for work, school or shops.
- Advising Sport England
- Water access

- **Working groups**

Most LAFs, including JLAF, use working groups very effectively to look at particular areas of work. You may wish to have a standing working group on RoWIP to follow on from your useful work on Local Assessment Areas or a one-off group to look at a specific subject. I note several Somerset LAF members are leading working groups on areas of particular interest to them.

- **Time**

A difficult issue when members are volunteers and you have already highlighted the commitment required. During your review day it would be useful to:-

- Identify the time and resource constraints
- Assess what can be achieved within those constraints
- Focus on a few key areas
- Prioritise your activities for the forthcoming year