



Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF)

for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire

JLAF Chairman Speaking Notes for B&NES Enterprise & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Panel 20th November 2007

My name is Ray Newbigin and I am Chairman of the Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) which covers three Councils, Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire.

As you see from my letter to your Chairman, we are a **statutory body** advising the three Councils on the improvement of public access for recreation and enjoyment. For your part, the three Councils have a **statutory obligation** to have regard to our advice. Public access includes walking, cycling and horse riding.

The members of the JLAF include three Councillors and representatives of land managers, walkers, cyclists and equestrian users. The Officers of the JLAF are also a mixed bag: the Deputy - Chairman is an officeholder of the Ramblers' Association and the Vice - Chairman is a recently retired NFU Secretary and I am an Independent.

Parliament seems to have had the idea that if they put the conflicting parties together then they hoped that the JLAF would try and resolve conflicts by **discussion, compromise and tolerance**.

At our last meeting on the 2nd of November the Officers of the JLAF were mandated to write to all three Councils about multi-user routes and I have taken the opportunity to come and talk to you today.

I will show that multiuser routes are economically beneficial to the area but they do need a certain measure of **tolerance** by all users and the public.

If you have a look at the statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP), which is part of the Local Transport Plan, you will see that the bridleway network is both limited and fragmented. You have a lower than the national average number of bridleways and figure 8 shows that most of your bridleways start nowhere and end nowhere. One way of trying to connect the ends of the existing bridleways is by connecting to existing cycle and pedestrian routes.

In an age when the nation's health, general obesity and, recently, the lack of exercise taken by young women is causing concern, horse riding is a health-giving outdoor pursuit. Disabled people enjoy riding and some of the JLAF members help organise this. There could be funding available for the disabled. It is also worth quoting a Devon County Council survey that "horse riding is dominated by women and is relatively ageless and classless".

The ROWIP reports that there are "at least 30 commercial horse riding stables in our area" (para 2.17) and I suggest that this is lower than the national average. If the network was improved then new commercial enterprises could be set up and tourism in the whole of the Councils' area would increase.

The JLAF suggests that where a route is wide enough and there are no physical obstacles, then the presumption should be that all cycle and footpaths should be multiuser routes. You conducted trials on four routes and there is no record of conflict but there are two reports of abuse to horse riders. You also have had two petitions about one route mentioning perceived dangers.

In these circumstances we suggest that the trial is continued for a further period in the hope that a sense of **tolerance** will surface.

Thank you for allowing me to address you and I would welcome questions.