

ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM, SECOND MEETING, 23 SEPTEMBER 2008, CHELTENHAM

EAF representatives

David Brookshaw , South East
Matthew Balfour, South East
Alistair Gordon, South West
Bob Harvey, South West
Andrew McCloy, East Midlands

Natural England representatives

James Marsden
Ciaran Gannon
Terry Robinson
Ben Nichols
Peter Ashcroft

Liddy Lawrence, East of England
Brian Montgomery, East Midlands
Duncan Graham, North West
Edgar Ernstbunner, North West
Edgar Powell, West Midlands
Hazel Armstrong, Yorkshire & Humber
Richard Holmes, Yorkshire & Humber
Steve Scoffin, North East
Pam Brooks, North East

Apologies from

Bob Smith, East of England
David Bowen, West Midlands
Claire Stuckey, South West

1 Regional support for Local Access Forums

The proposal from Natural England was accepted. The following points were made:

- LAF chairs would appreciate being involved in the selection of regional co-ordinators.
- Whilst it was recognised that Natural England staff would not attend every LAF meeting, sufficient face to face contact would be appreciated to build effective relationships.
- Progress would be reviewed at a future meeting.

Action: Natural England regional staff will, with the involvement of regional LAF chairs, commence the process of appointing the (part time) regional co-ordinators and in allocating training resources according to regional need.

2 Future EAF Meetings

It was agreed to arrange the dates of future meetings so that they provided opportunities to relate closely to Natural England's policy and programme development, as well as its corporate plan cycle of decision making. A programme will be drawn up in advance to enable LAFs and regions to make a co-ordinated and effective input.

Future meetings will take rotate around offices of Natural England.

Action: Peter Ashcroft and Ciaran Gannon to identify key opportunities for future meetings, to confirm dates with the chair and ensure that all LAFs are aware of them in advance.

3 Review of Trails and Routes

The meeting was presented with the findings arising from the review so far. As the review is part way through, and conclusions not yet made, this was a timely opportunity for representatives to provide initial re-actions and contribute to the thinking and analysis. The following points were made:

- Participation in horse-riding was limited by the lack of suitable bridleways.

- There are many different needs to cater for from 'pack on back' users who like to make extensive journeys to people who prefer short circular walks.
- Improving access for different users by changing route surfaces should be sensitively designed to avoid sanitising the countryside.
- National Trails are the elite routes in England, and now its time to bring other recreational routes into the fold, but without reducing the quality of National Trails.
- There should be more action to package walks and rides with information about services, pubs and cafes.
- National Trails can be used as an access spine through attractive corridors of land, linking settlements and places of interest.
- Better evidence is needed on the use made of trails and routes and the associated economic and health benefits. This would help to increase influence on the agenda of local authorities.

Action: 1. Members were invited to provide responses to the 3 questions posed in the presentation, by going back to LAFs in their own regions. Peter Ashcroft will circulate, a shortened version of the presentation. 2. Natural England plans to consult stakeholders on its future proposals for trails and routes when the review has completed its work. EAF and LAFs will be fully engaged in that.

4 Access Policy

The draft Natural England policy on access that was considered by the NE Board at their meeting on 16 September was tabled. This draft had been influenced by comments made by the EAF working group, and other close partners, during August. James Marsden thanked the chair for the working group's prompt and useful contributions.

Natural England will consult on the draft policy, following which it will be refined for approval by the Board.

Action: Members are welcome to share the current draft policy in their own regions in advance of being engaged in the formal consultation period later on.

5 Coastal Access

An update on progress with the Marine Bill was given. The following points were made:

- Accurate estimates of the costs of creating coastal access will be informed by access audits of some sample sections of the coast to establish where extra work will be needed.
- We are still at an early stage in clarifying the process for determining which sections of the coastal trail will be available for multi-use.
- The means of maintaining the coastal trail following its first ten years are yet to be confirmed.

6 Delivering Lost Ways:Stakeholder Working Group

This group is due to have its first meeting on 1 October 2008. Members were encouraged to make representations to the group as appropriate.

Action: The list of members of the SWG will be circulated to EAF members.

7 Ministry of Defence Training impacts on Access

An example of MOD proposals for training in the Howgills was discussed.

Action: Natural England will meet the MOD to ensure they are fully aware of all their responsibilities for safeguarding access and public safety. The issue of dealing with unexploded ordnance will also be raised.

8 The Constitution

Minor changes to the constitution were agreed. . It was noted that a paper had been emailed to some of the members from Bob Harvey after the agenda was circulated. It was agreed that the Chair should offer to meet with all the Chairs in the SW region.

9 The Working Group

The chair explained that The Working Group had two useful roles: to deal with access issues that do not make it onto the EAF agenda and to give prompt responses to Natural England early thinking documents on a confidential basis. The chair confirmed that the Group was not there to make policy decisions. An amendment was made to the Constitution to clarify its role

Action: Constitution to be altered to include the role of The Working Group and re-issued with these minutes. Items outstanding at the close of the meeting to be remitted by LAF representatives to the working group.