

THE WORKING GROUP OF THE ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM

Natural England
Northminster House
Northminster Road
Peterborough
PE1 1UA

Present

Bob Smith
Matthew Balfour
Hazel Armstrong
Pam Brooks
Duncan Graham
Peter Ashcroft

Minutes of meeting Friday 28 November 2008

1 Gating Orders

Edgar Ernstbrunner was thanked for his briefing. Information suggests this is a complex and frustrating issue. The Ramblers Association are running a campaign. Feedback from group members demonstrated some uncertainty about the exact legal process, how this was implemented by highway authorities and the extent of the problem.

Proposed Action:

- Natural England to confirm the legal process, including how the need is proved, rights of appeal etc.
- LAF regional co-ordinators will be asked with their LAFs to provide evidence of the scale of the problem in their region.
- Hazel to work with Peter on this.
- Potential future paper for EAF, subject to the above actions.

2 Bicycles on Trains

Following advice from Natural England it was decided that the best approach was for individual LAFs to approach their local train operating companies to seek improvements to the ability of trains to carry bicycles. There could be instances where a regional approach might be appropriate

3 RoW – monitoring quality

It was noted that the County Surveyors Society is undertaking research regarding the previously collected BVPI 178 data, the value of benchmarking in rights of way and options for future benchmarking.

Proposed Action:

- LAF regional co-ordinators will be asked to provide a provisional summary of how their highway authorities were monitoring quality, what methods were being used and how many were not monitoring.
- Potential future paper to EAF, when CSS have completed their research.

4 Local Area Agreements

The importance of getting access recognised in the strategic planning and funding mechanism known as Local Area Agreements was acknowledged. Natural England has a presentation explaining this.

Proposed Action:

- Pam to appraise the NE presentation to judge its usefulness to LAFs.
- If found useful, it would be made available to LAFs.

5 Landowner Representation on LAFs

Balance of all groups desirable. Remitted to PA to investigate what statistical evidence there is.

6 Protocol for inviting and appraising future EAF items

It was recognised that potential items for future EAF meetings need prioritising to ensure that the Forum's time is spent on issues that are of national interest and where EAF can make a difference.

Proposed Action:

- LAF regional co-ordinators to be reminded that nominations for items should be accompanied by a paper explaining the issue and setting out any solutions on offer and what action EAF might be asked to take.

7 Multi-Purpose Vehicles (MPVs)

Two papers demonstrating the problems and approaches to tackling the issue of MPVs were presented.

Proposed Action:

- the two papers will be sent to LAFs, via the regional co-ordinators, for information.
- Regions can then, if they wish, come back to EAF.

8 Rights of Way Improvement Plans Celebratory Event

- The Chair had welcomed the invitation from Natural England to take part in a selection panel comprising IPROW and an independent consultant because it was a positive way of raising the profile of ROWIPs, locally and nationally. There had been some delay in getting

access to details of its organisation, criteria, transparency etc and the provisional timescale of 17th December for judging was unrealistic.

The exact process for selecting the best ROWIPs was discussed and potential improvements identified to make them more practical and transparent.

Proposed Action:

- Duncan to pass on the working group's suggestions for improvements to the selection process in Natural England.
- Duncan to suggest a revised timetable.
- Duncan to ask EAF colleagues for volunteers to act as judges, subject to the arrangements being brought to an acceptable level.

9 Natural England Access Policy consultation event 21 Nov

Duncan reported that he was able to use the many useful comments received from LAFs in proposing improvements and changes to this draft policy. Natural England broadly welcomed the comments received which will lead to a revised and improved policy.

Proposed Action:

- The synthesis of LAF comments and the full file of individual comments be sent to Natural England to inform the revised draft which will form the basis of a recommendation to the NE Board in February 2009, with a view to publication of the strategy the following month.

10 National Trails and Routes Review consultation

A consultation document will be sent to LAF regional co-ordinators for onward dissemination shortly. The deadline for written comments is 31 January 2009. LAFs are urged to submit their observations via regional co-ordinators where they are in place.

11 Impact on Rights of Way from New Roads

A note from Suffolk was considered. It was decided to keep a watching brief on this. The Suffolk LAF had undertaken to provide a summary of the views received from other LAFs and EAF would consider this in due course.

12 Report back to EAF Members

Proposed Action

- To prepare a note of this meeting and forward to EAF members for their observations and approval.
- Note that the next EAF meeting is on 11 March 2009.