

**NOTES OF THE SW LAF CHAIRMEN'S MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY, 12th MAY 2009
NATURAL ENGLAND OFFICES, TAUNTON**

Present: Robin Moore (Cornwall CAF), Patrick Watson (Dartmoor AF) Terry Faulk (Devon CAF) Bob Harvey (Devon CAF and England Access Forum member), Jeremy Holtom (Exmoor LAF) Ray Newbigin (Joint LAF) Mike Amos (North Somerset LAF), Paul Heal (Somerset LAF and England Access Forum member), Eric Clarke (Wiltshire and Swindon LAF)

Colin Jones (Natural England), Hilary Winter (SW LAF Regional Coordinator)

Apologies: Oliver Chamberlain (Dorset LAF), John Burcher (Gloucestershire LAF), Ray Fairchild and Ian Stewart (Plymouth LAF), John Gibson (Torbay LAF)

Paul Heal chaired the meeting.

1. **Introductions** were made.

2. **England Access Forum matters and membership from the SW**

➤ ***Changes in Natural England staff***

Amanda Earnshaw has taken over from David Gear as national liaison person for LAFs. David Solly is the new EAF Secretary, taking over from Peter Ashcroft. A letter confirming their roles and responsibilities will be sent shortly.

➤ ***EAF meeting – March 2009, Sheffield***

Paul reported on the March EAF meeting. Overall, he felt it was a positive and constructive meeting with the aim of improving access to the countryside. EAF was finding ways to consult and was learning and moving forward. There was support for EAF as a sounding board, provided communication channels were clear and there was a proper process of consultation. The SW had to find a way of working with and influencing EAF.

➤ ***South West Access Forum***

Bob Harvey had received a letter from Rob Cooke, Director of Policy at Natural England, confirming that the EAF is the “conduit for all LAFs to engage effectively with Natural England at a national level. This channel complements the role of individual LAFs in consultations; it does not replace it”. Bob felt statutory advice from LAFs should precede formal consultation.

Bob Harvey presented a paper on a proposed South West Access Forum, a more formal grouping of the SW LAF Chairmen. A discussion took place on whether a more formal regional structure would add more credibility. Networking was included in the statutory Guidance for LAFs as an important role, to be decided on by the LAF and the appointing authority. However, a regional grouping was not a statutory duty or a formalised democratic process.

It was agreed a formal grouping was unnecessary. Funding for refreshments was available, through the regional coordinator's budget, for the SW Chairmen to meet together informally prior to each EAF meeting - three/four times a year. Travel costs would continue to be met by individual LAF budgets. The group could

discuss EAF agenda items or be proactive. Advance notice of EAF meeting dates was important, and might also help in planning LAF meetings, and this would be raised with David Solly, EAF Secretary. (Action: HW)

➤ **SW EAF representatives**

Bob Harvey stood down as EAF representative. Bob was thanked for his contribution and effort over the past year.

A discussion took place on a replacement for Bob. Paul Heal was the other EAF representative from the SW. In the absence of any agreed national procedure, it was agreed to keep to the process agreed at the regional LAF meeting held at Haldon in 2008:-

- One representative to be elected by the SW LAF Chairmen
- One representative to be elected by all LAF members

Paul had secured a place following voting by all members. Bob had been elected by all Chairmen and the Chairmen should therefore decide on his replacement. Ray Newbigin was duly elected, with Robin Moore remaining as a reserve.

3. Liaison with EAF, items for discussion and feedback to the region

At the Regional Coordinators' meeting, two possible EAF agenda items had arisen:-

- Fencing of woodland on access land
- Surfacing of multi-user routes

It was agreed there were concerns on these issues in the SW too. It was suggested that the access land item should be widened to include inaccessible access land, for example 'island sites' (Wiltshire) and scrubbing over through under-grazing (Dartmoor and Exmoor). It was noted that the Single Payment Scheme rules permitted continuation of payment for newly planted woodland and SPS would be lost if trees were not protected. The multi-user route item should include both surfacing and Sustrans consultation processes. (Action: HW)

4. Updates on Natural England

a) Coastal Access land

The assumption of Royal Assent in July was likely to slip. Following Assent there will be a 12 week consultation period on the draft Outline Scheme before it goes to the Secretary of State.

NE was talking to the initial group of authorities and testing parts of the scheme in other areas, for example on National Trust land in Dorset.

LAFs will be encouraged to take an early, pre-consultation stage role, possibly by obtaining data/information or seeking local views and then providing advice to the access authority.

Importantly, non coastal LAFs have a role in the consultations as users of coastal land,

b) Review of Trails and Routes

A paper will be going to the NE Board in July to be followed by roll-out of policy implications.

c) Open Access

Fewer applications for restrictions had been received than anticipated. From early August the process would be taken back in-house (NE offices in Bristol) with no on-line applications. LAFs would continue to be consulted on long-term applications.

An initial meeting had been held on how to proceed with the decadal review of access land. It was agreed it would be useful for LAFs to be consulted on the review process. This would be taken up. (Action: HW)

d) Stakeholder Working Group (NE) – post Discovering Lost Ways

Meetings were continuing. LAFs were encouraged to continue submitting evidence of useful processes. The group would be producing a report on the way forward to Defra. (Action: all LAFs)

e) Access Policy

This would be going to the May or July NE Board.

f) ‘Inspiring People’

A national event would take place in the summer. The initiative covers how to get people engaged in the natural environment and inspire them to get involved. NE would be releasing policy guidance.

g) ‘Natural Health Service’

NE would be launching its ‘natural health service’ at a series of regional events. A budget increase of £7.7m had been received for this work and includes walking for health and other green initiatives.

h) Landowners

The East Midlands region had employed a consultant to produce a leaflet aimed at attracting landowners to sit on LAFs, with three case studies. This would be made available electronically to other LAFs shortly.

5. Update on Regional Coordination activities

A national meeting of RCs had taken place. Most regions now had someone in post. A meeting of SW LAF secretaries had taken place in March.

6. Training Needs and Regional Conference

Following discussion it was agreed a regional event for 3 or 4 people per LAF should be held on either 19th or 20th October, preferably at the Somerset College of Arts and Technology in Taunton. A Natural England member of staff to start or end the day was suggested; possibly Terry Robinson (Head of People and Access Policy), Janette Ward (Regional Director) or Phil Collins (Manager of Regional Advocacy and Partnership team)

Suggested workshop topics were:-

- What is a LAF?
- Gating Orders
- Multi-use/Sustrans
- Coastal access
- Health

- Local Transport Plan
- Best Practice
- Measuring effectiveness
- Adding value to recreation land

It was agreed to give further consideration to workshop choices and agenda at the next meeting.

7. LAF Annual Reports and regional newsletter

Amanda Earnshaw was in the process of identifying NE regional staff to whom Annual Reports would be sent, subject to Defra agreement. Feedback on reports would be provided. It was agreed it would be useful for common themes and ideas of good practice to be forwarded to EAF and possibly compiled into an information sheet nationally for dissemination to other bodies.

The Regional Coordinator would be compiling a newsletter. All LAF Chairmen were encouraged to submit a short piece on items of interest from their LAF. (Action: All LAFs)

8. Any other business

- **Sustrans**
It was agreed Natural England should work with Sustrans to improve consultation processes and reduce variations that existed throughout the country. This should be included as part of the EAF agenda item on surfacing. Sustrans had been very successful in obtaining money but cycle routes were not part of the rights of way network and, in some authorities, had been handed to the local authority with subsequent maintenance and insurance issues.
- **Torbay**
John Gibson had sent a paper concerning a complaint made by the LAF to Torbay Council over diversion of a right of way and consequent loss of public space amenity. This complaint had been largely upheld by the Council's senior solicitor. This information was appreciated and John would be thanked for his hard work and tenacity in this area.
- **Defra/NE Liaison meeting**
The Regional Coordinator reported this was a regular meeting to discuss items of mutual interest. LAFs were one item which might be covered.
- **Cornwall**
Robin Moore had been invited to a meeting with NE to discuss working with the new unitary authority.
- **LAF finances**
It was confirmed that money for LAFs was not ring-fenced in the grant settlement to authorities.
- **NE and regional coordination**
NE was committed to funding regional coordination and supporting LAFs. Colin was trying to find a NE member of staff as a named contact for each LAF. Hilary was thanked for her work as RC.
- **Chair of SW LAF Chairmen's meetings**
It was agreed to have an agenda item on electing a chair for the meeting.