

# SOUTH WEST LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS

## NEWSLETTER

### Summer 2009

#### REGIONAL CONFERENCE TUESDAY, 20th OCTOBER 2009

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**Our regional event this year will be at the Genesis Centre, Somerset College of Arts and Technology, Taunton. I very much hope each LAF will be represented by three or four members and your Secretary will soon have booking forms and a full programme for the day.**

**Keynote speaker for the day, Terry Robinson, Head of People and Access Policy, Natural England, will be giving a presentation on *Natural England's Access and Recreation Policy and the role of LAFs.***

#### **Workshop subjects will be on:-**

- *Involving LAFs and local people in the coastal access implementation process.*
- *Local Transport Plan 3 – the role of RoWIPs and the LAF.*
- *The health agenda and LAFs.*
- *Sustrans – implementation of regional policy and working more effectively with LAFs.*

**It should be a useful day with opportunities to learn about key topics for LAFs and, importantly, to network with other LAF members from across the region.**

October 2009						
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**20th October  
Regional  
Conference**

#### ***Focus on Paul Heal***

Paul is one of the two SW representatives on the England Access Forum. Having been Vice Chairman of Somerset LAF for the past three years he has just become Chairman.

Paul has recently retired, having been a Partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers, the global accounting and business advisory firm. He is a Chartered Accountant and was a Partner for 20 years in the Bristol office. He works on a part time basis with some of his former clients and he is a non executive director and Chairman of the Audit Committee of a public company listed on the Stock Exchange and Director and member of the Finance Committee of The Theatre Royal, Bath and Director and member of the Audit Committee of The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

He has lived for the last 22 years in East Pennard, near Shepton Mallet, Somerset where he and his wife have a smallholding, breeding pedigree Jacob sheep and a motley collection of rare breeds of chickens. He is Treasurer of the East Pennard PCC.

His interests are wide and varied, in addition to the smallholding Paul actively partakes in:

- **Walking...** he has been a member of a Bristol based walking group, "Solvitur Ambulando", for more than 20 years. The group meet with their dogs to walk 12/15 miles once a month with the occasional weekend walk.
- **Motorsport...** Paul is active as a competitor and organiser in classic car rallying and has been involved in competitions across the world including classic car rallies in South America, the Sahara, Eastern Europe and many local club events.

*(I understand Solvitur Ambulando means "it is solved by walking" – very apt). The next newsletter will feature Ray Newbigin, Chairman of the JLAF who is the second representative.*

### *News clips from around the region*

**Somerset Local Access Forum** went for a series of visits around Somerset on a rather wet May day. The theme was to look at the cost to the limited Rights of Way budget of major works to open up paths that would not score highly in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

These visits gave a flavour of the disproportionate cost of opening up routes which had fallen into disuse over the years but were now added to the Definitive Map based on historical evidence. Additional routes, on the Definitive Map from the outset, were not physically capable of being used by the category of users they were intended for. These routes are now logged as faults, affecting performance figures, as their resolution has to await extra funding or expensive diversions with potential objections leading to public inquiries.

The National Stakeholder Working Group is likely to make recommendations and consult about the way future historical claims are added to the Definitive Map. There needs to be consideration about the most cost effective way of improving the rights of way networks around the country.

Having seen some of the problem sites the members were aware of, and suggested, alternative means that could have been used to improve the network but which are not straightforward or available because of current legislation. From what could have been a rather depressing day (weather included!) has come a positive opportunity for them to give informed feedback to facilitate change where legislation and its restrictions are not serving the network and the users well.

The photo is of SLAF members looking at a restricted byway running along a narrow stream bed (multiple landowners - all livestock) with a public footpath just the other side of the wire netting and post fence!

*Sally Vickery, Somerset LAF Secretary*



### **Joint Local Access Forum**

The Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire covers a wide area of both urban and rural populations.

**So how do we organise ourselves?** With three Local Authorities to look after, we have three Chairmen and each looks after one Authority. The three Chairmen and Secretary of the JLAF meet three times within the cycle of JLAF meetings. The first meeting plans the next agenda; the second (which is two weeks after the JLAF meeting) ensures that actions are taken and the third is a general discussion without an agenda. All the JLAF members are on e-mail. In addition to the JLAF, each Authority already had a PROW Liaison Group consisting of user groups, parish representatives, civic societies, some JLAF members and one of the JLAF Chairmen. Fortunately the Liaison Groups discuss detailed points about Rights of Way and Access Land in their area which means the JLAF can concentrate on broader issues. The JLAF website, which is down to the enthusiasm and IT skills of our Secretary Chris Hogg, also Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer covering all three Authorities, is a source of pride and we understand is accessed by professionals!

Another important point is that **we try to obtain a consensus** in the JLAF and this is helped by the Vice-Chairman representing “land managers”, the Deputy-Chairman “users” and the Chairman “other interests”.

**So what has the JLAF achieved?** We actively responded to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and even got favourable mentions in the final report! Arising from that work, the JLAF have canvassed hard to get legal protection for The Monarch’s Way in Bristol, to extend the route around the Chew Valley Lake and to obtain access to some skyline Access Land overlooking Bath. All three projects are progressing well. The ROWIP has raised the profile of access and rights of way in our three councils, has released funding and made possible a number of access projects led by the Rights of Way Teams.

We believe that the JLAF is known to the relevant politicians and Officers in our three Authorities because we have written to them, canvassed them and spoken at Scrutiny Panels and Committees. A NE staff member attends the JLAF meetings and we have discussed pertinent issues with NE managers and NE specialists in the region. We also have a continuing dialogue with Bristol Water and Sustrans and we would approach any other authority or organisation where we feel this could benefit or improve Rights of Way

*Ray Newbiggin, JLAF Chairman.*

## Torbay LAF

Assisted by Colin Jones, NE, Torbay LAF was encouraged to look at its client groups, i.e. which particular groups it needs to serve and with whom should the LAF be in dialogue and advising?

These are basic questions which a LAF needs to ask itself from time to time in order to take a proactive role rather than a passive one (simply responding to situations/consultations) and it very much needs the help of the invited organisations to ensure the LAF's role is both relevant and useful.

Torbay LAF has realised that the issuing of Advice is not the only thing a LAF can do, it can also lodge a Formal Complaint with its Appointing Authority in order to clear the way for a more open understanding of a Council's intentions which affect the public's enjoyment or public access areas.

*John Gibson, Torbay LAF Chairman*

## Cornwall CAF

The recent request for information on wind farm proposals has brought forth a very useful position paper from Cornwall on wind farms. It is likely that planning applications will increase in the future, particularly for sites in some of the SWs attractive landscape areas.

Cornwall CAF sent a useful letter to all planning authorities, supported by reference to appropriate biodiversity, planning and landscape documents. The particular statement on public rights of way stated:

“Where an application for a wind energy scheme is close to a Public Right of Way or Access Land the safety of members of the public must always be paramount. Access to the countryside is important for health and well-being and needs to be encouraged. CCAF believes that the planning authority should also consider to what degree the development would degrade the experience for the user, whether walker, rider, cyclist or driver, and whether this is acceptable.”

Additional sections on ecology, landscape and visual impact, mitigation and tourism are included in the position statement.

**In the next newsletter it would be good to include something from all LAFs in the region. Finding out what other LAFs are up to can stimulate fresh ideas and interest. If you've got a moment send me an update.**



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*An e-mail to Duncan Graham, Chairman of the England Access Forum explains further the matter of water access. Some SW LAFs have been involved in this area and this exchange is helpful.*

Dear Mr Graham

The guidance you refer to, issued on 28<sup>th</sup> May, makes no difference to the role of LAFs in relation to water access, it simply clarifies the position. This revised guidance was issued as a result of us receiving legal advice. LAFs have, and always had, a non statutory, advisory role in relation to water access.

Some confusion regarding this area seems to stem from a letter sent to all LAF members and secretaries by Alun Michael on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2004. In it he states ‘...we need to give further consideration to the role of forums in advising on wider forms of access, including access to water. Some of you may already have dealt with this issue in your area and I would welcome specific views and experience on this issue’. This letter did not give any commitment to LAFs in relation to their role in access to water; a LAF's role in advising on public access to water remains a non statutory one but that is no reason for them not to offer advice and guidance.

We, and the Environment Agency, welcome and appreciate the efforts of LAFs in this area and see no reason for them not to continue the excellent work they currently do. If you have any further queries please contact me.

Martin Gorringer  
Recreation & Access Team  
Defra

**The Guardian on 7<sup>th</sup> July published a response from Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England. “Our disconnection from the countryside has to be tackled urgently.”**



Your leader article maintained that “despite opening up a million hectares of land in England and Wales (and more in Scotland), a day out in the countryside is a less popular option that it was a decade ago” (Off the beaten track, 20 June).

Whether total numbers are falling or whether the right to roam has delivered increased visits is an unresolved question and no survey is definitive. What we can see is that hundreds of millions of people access the countryside each year, but that the pattern of usage is changing – people are making shorter trips nearer home, more of them undertaken by car. Villages in our national parks are filling up with traffic, while hiking remains a minority pursuit. We are becoming less intrepid, there is less mud on our boots, but the appetite to be out in the natural environment in some shape or form is very much there.

You say one reason the right to roam was “bitterly opposed in advance but has since cause barely a murmur of dissent” might be that there are now fewer people who want to strike out into open country”. In the

absence of definitive surveys, we can’t easily draw that conclusion and, as chief executive of the organisation responsible for delivering the biggest transformation in access for 60 years, I think the ways in which the right to roam has been implemented have played a major role in diffusing tensions.

There have been years of painstaking negotiations and consultations with thousands of landowners, reassuring them that improving access is not about deluging the countryside with visitors of riding roughshod over property rights. With the marine and coastal access edging closer to the statute book, those lessons should be remembered – far too long the coastal access debate has concentrated on scare stories that access will be forced through people’s gardens, property prices will plummet and local businesses will be destroyed. As with the right to roam, it won’t be like that.

You claim that there are “worrying signs that people who live in towns now feel divorced from rural life, uncertain what to do and where



to go.” It is ominously clear that large parts of society now remain utterly detached from the countryside and have no discernible interest in accessing it, but we should be careful what conclusions we draw. To some this is an invitation to call time on further attempts to open up the countryside. To me, society’s growing disconnection from the natural world cries out for policies and investment to create more—not fewer—opportunities for access. We need more green spaces in urban environments; more can be done to make farmland and downland more accessible; and we need to encourage children to play freely outdoors (our recent survey shows that more than 90% don’t have proper access to outdoor play).

The fact that a generation of “cotton-wool kids” has been prevented from enjoying the countryside urgently needs addressing. None of this can be delivered easily, but a society that fails to make this investment will lose the life-enhancing opportunities that other generations have taken for granted.



**A guide to walks for mothers of young children in Plymouth could become big business for its student creators.**

A venture capitalist has shown interest in Pambles after it won a prize for young entrepreneurs. Now the Affinity team, from Plymouth College and Plymouth High School for Girls, could be asked to produce guides for other cities. One hundred copies of the guide have been sold in a city bookstore in the first four weeks.

Jess Evans, of Affinity, said: “It was quite hard to make sure all the walks were pram friendly so “we route-tested each of the walks with a sack of potatoes and a pram.”

## **LAF briefing note from Natural England:**

### **Local Transport Plan and Rights of Way Improvement Plan Integration**

#### **New guidance has been published**

The Department for Transport published new Local Transport Plan (LTP) guidance on 16<sup>th</sup> July to help local highway authorities prepare their new LTP that is required in 2010. Natural England has seized this opportunity to work with DfT and produce a guidance note that explains in more detail the part that rights of way can play in the wider transport system. Linking statutory rights of way improvement plans to local transport plans will promote a shift to active travel, a more interesting and connected transport network and help lever funding for implementation schemes that meet several joint objectives. Our good practice note, published in July and directly linked to the DfT LTP webpage, gives advice on how to achieve these outcomes and make efficient use of funding. It gives good practice examples of measures to ensure successful integration and includes the role of LAFs.

#### **Why it is important**

The new LTP guidance recognises the role of active travel solutions such as walking and cycling. There is now an opportunity for local authorities to take a broader, more holistic approach to transport and address the rights of way network as an integral part of urban and rural transport systems and in contributing to the achievement of all the national transport goals.

There are many shared aims and links between LTPs and ROWIPs which can serve to strengthen and facilitate the long term sustainability of rights of way and the delivery of sustainable transport objectives. Joined up implementation plans can secure more direct and integrated funding and delivery

Integration encourages new ways of working with internal and external partners including local access forums. Integration gives local authorities an advantage in delivering positive benefits for people and the natural environment – a more active lifestyle in a greener, healthier, low carbon, quieter and safer environment.

The LTP guidance lists LAFs in Annex C List of Stakeholders and refers to their important role.

On the strength of the new guidance we encourage LAFs to support the idea to integrate the ROWIP with the LTP; to remember that leisure use of ROW and business/ access to services use are not mutually exclusive and we encourage LAFs to think about what ROW improvements can support the national transport goals identified in the new DfT LTP and Natural England LTP/ROWIP guidance.

#### **For more information**

We have published our LTP and ROWIP Integration Good Practice Note at

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/rightsofway/default.aspx>

Catalogue

<http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/Product.aspx?ProductID=a9f67df9-f61d-40ae-9ed7-457b60b89394>

It is linked and forms part of the DfT Local Transport Guidance published at

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/ltp>

Contact: Jane Yates, Policy team People and Access 0300 060 0548

*Jane will be tackling this subject in more detail during one of the workshops at the Regional Conference*