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**Subject:** Natural England update

There are various papers for the Natural England Board meeting next week which are of interest to LAFs. I have included key extracts below with weblinks but the full papers are on the site

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about\\_us/ourpeople/neboard/meetings/feb10/default.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about_us/ourpeople/neboard/meetings/feb10/default.aspx) if you wish to see the full agenda and details. I am copying in secretaries and LAF Chairmen to ensure as many people as possible see this before the meeting on Monday in case people wish to raise any of these matters with Colin Jones, NE.

An update on the **Stakeholder Working Group** on public rights of way (this replaced the Discovering Lost Ways project) and copy of a letter to the Minister from the Group.

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1904\\_tcm6-17016.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1904_tcm6-17016.pdf)

It is anticipated that the final report of the Group will be published in March.

Update on the **One Million Children Outdoors** - promoting understanding and awareness of the natural environment. The access elements of this include access on farms through Stewardship Schemes and on National Nature Reserves.

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1905\\_tcm6-17018.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1905_tcm6-17018.pdf)

#### **Natural England's draft Position on Urban areas.**

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1911\\_tcm6-17024.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1911_tcm6-17024.pdf) This includes a number of position statements on biodiversity, climate change etc. but importantly for LAFs position statement 4 relates to access.

#### **4. People should have opportunities to readily access high quality natural environment in urban areas in order to enjoy the broad range of environmental and social benefits it offers.**

The paper goes on to outline the benefits of access to green space and the need to encourage people to take up those opportunities. If your LAF needs evidence to support Local Development Framework consultation responses then this section also includes evidence base statistics which are very useful, for example:

- *Environmental and health impacts are not equally distributed within cities. In the UK in 2004, 20% of those in the lowest income groups lived in poor quality environments compared to 11% of those in the highest income groups. (UK Office for National Statistics, 2007)*
- *For every 10% increase in green space there can be a reduction in health complaints in communities equivalent to a reduction of 5 years of age. (De Vries, S Verheij, R A & Groenewegen, P P, 2001.)*
- *Studies of eight European cities show that people who live in areas with abundant green open space are three times more likely to be physically active and 40% less likely to be overweight or obese. (Ellaway et al, 2005)*

In its **Evidence and Analysis Priorities for 2010/2011** Natural England reaffirms its commitment to people and access

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1906\\_tcm6-17019.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1906_tcm6-17019.pdf)

### **People and Access**

Key drivers for our evidence and analysis work include the Marine and Coastal Access Act and the need to underpin our future targeted actions around people and access with a sound understanding of people's use of the natural environment.

Areas of particular focus will be:

- ⌚ Continuing implementation of our monitoring of people's engagement with the natural environment.
- ⌚ Establishing an integrated monitoring and evaluation framework for our interventions in this area of work, for example coastal access.

Finally, the **Chief Executive's report to the Board** meeting.

[http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1902\\_CE\\_tcm6-17010.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NEBPU1902_CE_tcm6-17010.pdf) Pertinent extracts are below.

#### *Delivery on Outcome 2*

3.4.1 226,000 children have now participated in the Million Children Outdoors programme during the year, 59,000 in the quarter, which is 90% of the 250,000 target. 150,000 of these visits have been enabled through Educational Access funding for farm visits that comes from our Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) funding. 14,000 children from over 450 schools have joined our website to participate in our Big Wildlife Garden 'school of the year' competition. Funding for Walking for Health has been confirmed for 2010/11 by the Department of Health and there are now 62,961 participants recorded against a Quarter 3 target of 40,838.

3.4.2 Access to Nature is meeting most of its targets although the target for the number and value of awards made this year is at some risk. To date £6.2m of an anticipated commitment of £11m has been awarded to 32 projects. This is a result of the grants panel ensuring the quality of the bids without putting the funding, which can be carried forward into 2010/11, at risk. Our volunteer numbers increased in the quarter (growth of 13% in year to date) We are now finalising and consulting on our statutory coastal access scheme and putting in place working arrangements with lead access authorities. Planning is underway for the Weymouth stretch to be ready for the Olympics. We are largely on track with the development of three „Champion National Nature Reserves" (NNRs) but efforts need to continue to secure external funding.

#### *Delivery on Outcome 3*

3.5.1 Our engagement with Government on the 8 national Policy Statements has been largely successful, highlights include Green Infrastructure and the State of the Green belt. We are on track with our targets to integrate the natural environment into all 9 Regional Strategies and the results of our customer survey (150 individuals from Local authorities) this quarter showed 78% agree Natural England is advising on the integration of the natural environment into local strategies and 68% that Natural England is co-operating fully with local authorities and their partnerships.

#### **Additional points from the Chief Executive's report**

- The Coastal Access methodology report is scheduled for 23 April. Although the methodology would have to be signed off by the Minister before the election is formally announced we will only be able to publish towards the end of April. Any delays could mean that the Weymouth stretch of the path might not be open in time for the 2012 Olympics. We will be seeking guidance and clarification from the Cabinet office on how best to proceed
- We continue to be on track to maintain at least 99% of open access land open for use by walkers through statutory and other management activities and are putting in place plans for our imminent expansion of statutory access work (Coastal Access; Countryside and Rights of Way mapping review; and National Trails Delivery Review) as well as ongoing regional statutory work on open access. Delays with completion of Section 15 assessments in some regions lead to the „amber green" status but outlook for delivery is good.

- We are helping 64 local authorities to develop GI strategies and 98 local authorities to ensure delivery of GI in areas of major housing growth and regeneration. Our GI Guidance continues to be the most frequently accessed information on the web-site.
- In the South West region, we are working in partnership with Wiltshire Council to deliver the Higher Level Stewardship scheme across the County. Wiltshire Council has seconded a member of its staff to work full time with us to help develop, negotiate and arrange contracts with farmers and land-owners to deliver significant environmental benefits in high priority areas.