

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2010

Dear Colleagues,

### **Future of the England Access Forum**

You will recall that I sent an email on 5<sup>th</sup> November to the Chair and Chief Executive of Natural England asking for a meeting within two weeks to resolve questions about the future which have dragged on interminably. There is proof that the email has been received and read.

Sadly, I have received neither a response nor the courtesy of an acknowledgment. We must draw our own conclusions.

There has been no progress on the joint analysis of the submissions made by LAFs, beyond the conclusion that the vast majority of those LAFs which responded would like to see EAF as a Forum to represent their views at national level and to champion access. There has been no assurance of adequate support or continuity.

That LAFs do not seem to figure in the thinking of NE can be deduced from a letter sent out on the 16<sup>th</sup> November by Helen Phillips arrestingly entitled "transferring delivery of our access and engagement related work to civil society". We were not amongst the consultees. A brave new world is postulated but apparently with no place for Local Access Forums.

What is frustrating is that there has never been a better or more appropriate time for the voice of LAFs to be heard and their advice heeded. LAFs have so much practical advice to offer on how best to mitigate the effects of major reductions in expenditure and views which deserve to be heard regarding the potentially most damaging of the outcomes.

LAFs and regions have been asking for EAF to lead a national response on topics including:

- Working with government and the Forestry Commission to find the best ways to bring about change while minimising the impact on recreation and the environment
- The major impact on access of the withdrawal of funds from the HLS schemes
- The next generation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans in the current financial climate
- The impact of budget reductions on the work of Highway Authorities and the backlogs of DMMOs, prospect of forced mergers and staff losses etc.

In a letter following our September meeting with the Minister (contrast the Chair of NE), Richard Benyon MP, he recognises the significant contribution that LAFs and EAF have to make to improving access.

There is nothing more I can do!

Best wishes

Duncan Graham