

LAF NEWS

Quarter 3 2013/14

Issue 3

Welcome

Thank you for all your contributions to our 3rd LAF News which really shows what LAFs can do when they find a way to bring their skills and knowledge together to address local access needs.

In this edition of the newsletter you can read how LAFs have played an important role in securing access benefits on Common Land and in reducing the impacts to access of fencing open access land by getting involved in the discussions and influencing key players.

Discover how 'best practice whiteboards' help to both clarify understanding and trigger debate, with a particular example of debate arising from the Ramblers recent report 'Paths in Crisis'.

The Environment Agency can often have a major impact on local access issues, so it's great to read about their own Access for All Design Guide and to introduce the officers charged with its overview.

And finally, from a Natural England perspective, we reflect on how LAFs have played a critical role in helping to set up and deliver some of our Paths for Communities projects. We are also pleased to introduce the rest of our team to you!

Don't forget, the aim of this newsletter is to share and showcase what LAFs are involved in and topics of interest, so if there's anything you would like to see or contribute, please let us know.

Martin Shaw
Senior Advisor, LAF and Paths for Communities

In this issue...

[Paths in Crisis](#)

[Sustaining the Commons](#)

[Peterborough LAF and Paths for Communities](#)

[Cornwall LAF and Paths for Communities](#)

[Fencing woodland](#)

[Design Guide - Environment Agency](#)

[Huddle Update](#)

[Who's Who in Natural England](#)

Paths in Crisis

By Rob Leek - Lead Advisor, Natural England

Over summer 2013 the Ramblers contacted every local authority in England using a freedom of information request, asking for information on rights of way budgets and the work they're doing. This has informed their recently published report called 'Paths in Crisis'.

To alert LAFs to the report, a Huddle Whiteboard was created. This has sparked a series of informative comments from LAF Huddle members about the report and the issues it covers. Peter Hughes writes:

"I commend the RA for saying that they want to work with the Local Authorities to repair path problems. The best way they can do this is not by just reporting problems so that they have available horror statistics such as the ones quoted in the report. But much more usefully those who use the network can get out there and do some work to maintain the network either as formal volunteers or just a person who uses the network, with a pair of secateurs or a slasher, cutting back the brambles, branches or nettles, or with a spade digging grips where there are wet areas

I know that many Ramblers do this already but I am equally sure that there are lots of members who could do more to help ."

Other commentators refer to Horse riders and maintenance, raising awareness of landowner's responsibilities and how different users (walkers, cyclists, horse riders) can work together clearing public rights of way routes.

If any LAF Huddle Workspace members would like to join in and contribute to the comments they can be found just below the whiteboard with the 'Add a Comment' link at the bottom of the page. If you are a LAF member but not currently on Huddle please contact your Regional Coordinator or Rob Leek and they can arrange for you to be given access to the workspace.

Sustaining the Commons

By Tom Bolton (Durham Local Access Forum)

County Durham LAF was represented at "Sustaining the Commons", a one day conference held at Newcastle University on 5th July 2013.

The conference concluded the "Building Commons Knowledge" project, funded by The Arts and Humanities Research Council, which ran from 2012 up to June 2013 and was a partnership between Lancaster and Newcastle Universities, the Foundation for Common Land and The National Trust. The aim of the project is to create an online 'Commons Knowledge Resource Bank', containing both a comprehensive database of research resources on common land and new material on the history of commons in England and Wales. A key aim of the conference was to explore how we can best recognise, protect and celebrate the cultural heritage of modern commons.

Links

To view the Ramblers report online follow this link

Huddle specific link

**Paths in crisis
Whiteboard**

To join the huddle workspace please contact your regional coordinator or Rob Leek

rob.leek@naturalengland.org.uk

The Conference explored a wide range of issues, including the statutory protection of common land; tackling encroachments; registration and regulation of commons; reconciling conservation and farming; the growth of leisure and recreation on commons (including the CROW Act 2000); providing ecosystem services; capturing commons stories; sustaining common land; and the importance of commons in relation to biodiversity, archaeology, health, tourism and local businesses.

One of the major themes to emerge from the conference was that sustainable governance of common land is needed if it is to survive and meet the needs of stakeholders and the public benefit. This includes governance that reconciles public access and recreation on the one hand, with economic resource use (eg agriculture) and also with nature conservation and other environmental demands. Governance needs to involve all interest groups and good communication is key.

One of the issues for local authorities to consider is what role they play in relation to commons in their areas. Commons Registration Authorities, such as Durham County Council, have a statutory duty to maintain the official registers of common land and village greens, but should they have any role beyond this (such as the Open Spaces Society advocates)? For instance, are there any local forums (commons councils) where the Registration Authority should engage with commoners groups, or landowners? Should Registration Authorities police commons in relation to unauthorised works or encroachments? What are the resource implications of so doing? Are there any policies in planning or other documents concerning Common Land and its importance to the countryside and landscape and/or as a recreational resource? And also, just as with public rights of way, how do we link commons into the health agenda (possibly via Health and Wellbeing Boards)?

Whilst some Registration Authorities might take a very limited view of their role (particularly in these cash-strapped times), some councils actually own common land themselves, such as Durham County Council in the case of Waldrige Fell, which is operated along the lines of a country park. There are also provisions in the Commons Act 2006 (Section 45) whereby Local Authorities (at all tiers) can exercise powers to protect registered common land against unlawful interference where no owner is registered or can be found. However, it must be remembered – (a) that these powers are discretionary, not mandatory and (b) the commoners themselves have powers in some situations.

Another area where local authorities may play a role is in seeking to register land in their ownership as common land or village green. In the case of common land, this would probably require a grant of rights of common over the land to one or more individuals. Finally, Schedule 2 of the Commons Act 2006 allows for de registration of common land in certain circumstances on application to the Registration Authority. Although such instances are very rare, this potentially could remove land from public access and the County Durham LAF has suggested to Durham County Council that it should be consulted if the County Council receives any such applications in future. The County Durham LAF is currently consulting with Durham County Council on some of the above issues.

Links



To view the Foundation for common land website follow [this link](#)

The conference was held in July of 2013 but for information you can still [view the brochure here](#)

Peterborough LAF support two P4C grants

By Fiona Taylor, Lead Advisor - Natural England

Two successful Paths for Communities (P4C) bids have been awarded to projects in Peterborough: Pilsgate Path in Burghley and the second, a project in the Parish of Peakirk.

A theme common to both projects was strong leadership from a determined and enthusiastic main contact (a P4C must-have!); but both projects also benefitted from advice and support from their LAF.



The Peakirk project was born and bred in the LAF itself: the main contact, Highway Authority representative, landowners and technical experts ALL sit on Peterborough LAF.

Together they worked on the Maxey Cut to River Welland link path

proposal. The bid was recognised by the Grants Panel as being particularly complex and the main contact, Sally-Ann Jackson, was commended for steering the project through. "Everyone has been so helpful," says Sally-Ann. "This footpath has been an aspiration in our community for over 50 years!"

The range of partners includes multiple landowners: small private farmers, a large private estate, the Environment Agency, Network Rail and Internal Drainage Board, local volunteers and charitable trusts, Parish Councils, two Highway Authorities, Planning Authorities, private businesses and many more!

When complete, the path will provide an off-road link from Peakirk village and will form part of a new circular walk.

Peterborough LAF is a small, informal (and highly productive!) group which meets regularly in the Fitzwilliam Arms in Marholm, Peterborough.

Working with Paths For Communities

By Adrian Bigg (Cornwall Countryside Access Forum)

Cornwall Countryside Access Forum's (CCAF) involvement in Paths For Communities (P4C) has been key to realising successful projects. The first project by West Penwith Bridleways Association together with the British Horse Society will complete a bridleway link, over a boggy area, from Chapel Carn Brea to Brane via St Euny Well, in a beautiful prehistoric landscape with one of the best preserved ancient villages, near Lands End

The second is a major project by the National Trust working with the British Horse Society, the CCAF, Cornwall AONB Partnership and a broad range of community and user groups to create a new 10 mile bridleway network around the National Trust coastal property at Penrose, near Helston. An important factor was the previous good liaison between the National Trust and the British Horse Society and

LAF News

the trialling of horse and cycle access that had given the Trust much confidence in developing the forward thinking plans that are now being implemented and importantly to provide a definite bridleway network.

A very important part of the conception and planning for both these projects was engagement with local communities and future users

Adrian Bigg of CCAF and BHS liaised closely with the National Trust Head Ranger, Mike Hardy, to help develop the plans on its property to maximise the benefits to all users and local communities. The CCAF membership made a site visit to Penrose and offered advice on the day and its full support to the project.



At West Penwith, again the CCAF through Adrian Bigg was able to give day to day advice and support to the applicant to help smooth the grant application process to a successful outcome.

Most of the project work is now complete and a fantastic newly constructed 200 metre section over a previously boggy area provides a superb bridleway for all and also enabling wheel chair users access to the St Euny Well. A local farmer generously donated a brand new section of bridleway along the boundary of his field, which enabled this project to proceed.



Fencing of New Woodlands on Open Access Land

by Ken Taylor and Geoff Wilson (Lake District Local Access Forum)

Over the last few years, members of the Lake District LAF have become increasingly concerned at the number of new fences being erected on Open Access Land within the National Park. These were almost all associated with planting of new native woodlands, where it was judged necessary to exclude livestock and wildlife (particularly deer) to improve establishment rates. The incentive to landowners to plant new native woodlands comes from the Higher Level Stewardship and Woodland Creation Schemes administered by Natural England and Forestry Commission respectively.

The LAF's concerns centred around two key points:

- the location of the fences were being determined by factors which had little regard for public access considerations;
- terms of grant excluded specific arrangements for removal of fences. The fences were supposedly 'temporary' (usually up to 15 years) but, based on previous experience with fencing used to assist re-hefting of flocks after Foot and Mouth in 2001, are at risk of becoming permanent fixtures. On open access land which is not common, this might influence the land's future inclusion on revised Open Access maps.

Links



Newly planted trees on ghyll sides on Blencathra

In response, the Lake District LAF:

- drew up some guidelines which are sent to anyone in the process of developing planting plans (and have made them available to LAFs and officers in neighbouring authority areas);
- are consulted by NE and FC so that we can have an input into scheme design;
- are developing a database (with NE and LDNPA support) for recording attributes of temporary fences on Open Access land so that, in future, we will be able to ensure their removal as soon as possible.

The Environment Agency's Access for All Design Guide

By Connor McIlwrath - Senior Environmental Project Manager
Environment Agency

In 2012 the Environment Agency published their access for all design guide. The guide was produced with the help of a number of organisations who have an interest in the provision of inclusive access such as Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales and the Centre for Accessible Environments.

Within the Environment Agency we wish to encourage more people from all backgrounds to enjoy the natural environment and its benefits. One of our corporate commitments is to make more of our operational estate accessible to people and communities for their discovery and enjoyment so the creation of this guide will help us to achieve this aim.

Between April 2008 and April 2009 more than 32 million people visited a river, lake or canal that we have influence over so we are in a key position to promote the provision of inclusive access. We can improve people's enjoyment of these spaces by providing better and appropriate access for as many users as reasonably possible and by removing barriers that restrict both disabled and non-disabled people. The hope is that this guide will help designers to make an informed decision about the standard of access that

Download the guide for free:
[The Environment Agency's Design guide](#)



LAF News

can be achieved.

When the idea of a design guide was first conceived it was decided, rather than replicating the valued research and guidance already out there, this guide would be different. It would be highly illustrative and include real life case studies, highlighting both good and bad examples.

The guide is made up of three sections:

Background: provides an introduction to the provision of access in the external environment and a summary of the legal duties placed on us as a public body. It also introduces the design element sheets which form the core of the guide.

Design Element Sheets: highly illustrative using diagrams and images to demonstrate the key points. There are a total of 15 sheets covering a range of common access features such as steps and ramps. Most projects will need to consider a number of these access features so collating them into one document will provide an efficient and effective approach.

Management and Maintenance: the final section discusses the internal and external consultation that needs to be undertaken when considering access proposals and the future management to ensure the standard of access is maintained.



Looking along the top of a refurbished flood embankment near Blackpool. The existing footpath was widened and resurfaced as part of the scheme to provide access for wheelchairs, cyclists and horse riders. Since completing the scheme the local authority have extended the new bridleway along the coast to Fleetwood.

The guide is intended to promote the provision of inclusive access so that it becomes a key consideration from the outset. This is important in helping us promote sustainable development and providing an equality of access to our assets, which is a commitment we have made in our corporate strategy 'Creating a Better Place'. The guide will play a central role in the future development of our capital works programme and will help us promote access for all in the external environment.

Huddle Update

Over the last few weeks the Natural England Local Delivery Team with assistance from the LAF Regional Coordinators have been developing a series of "Best Practice Huddle Whiteboards". Each Whiteboard collates information and links on a particular theme of relevance to LAFs and they will be continually monitored and updated over time.

The intention is to develop more "best practice" whiteboards and for the convenience of Huddle users, a direct link to access them has been added to the introduction text in the Overview section of the LAF Huddle Workspace.

Links

For further information please contact:

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Comments and suggestions on how the Whiteboards could be improved are welcomed – please contact Rob Leek

rob.leek@naturalengland.org.uk

Huddle specific links

Best Practice whiteboards

**Workspace
overview section of Huddle**

Who's Who in Natural England



Jane Yates is lead advisor for the Access Local Delivery and Paths For Communities team, covering the SW of England. She has longstanding experience working with LAFs. Jane has worked on large-scale Green Infrastructure delivery schemes, the National Character Areas programme, National Access Policy and guidance and led the National ROWIP programme for Natural England as well as major research projects including the England Leisure Visits Survey series. Her main interests

outside work are mountain biking.

Jim Milner is the lead advisor based in the North East - My role has been through, and continues to go through, many changes and during this time I have developed my interest in access. I have worked with permissive access in CSS/HLS. This developed into an interest in the public rights of way network, and permanent access. My childhood was spent on a farm in the Durham Dales where I developed a love of mountain bikes and landscape and this spilled over into my work. The mountain bike has been replaced by a road bike and I tend to explore the landscape on that, or on foot with my partner Sarah (who also works for NE!) and my two children. As they get older I look forward to long walks along the beautiful Northumberland Coast, or Hadrian's Wall.



Fiona Taylor is the East of England's Grants Officer for the Paths for Communities grant scheme and is the Natural England contact for LAFs in the region plus the South Lincs and Rutland LAF. Her roles within Natural England have included working on the national evaluation programme in Walking for Health. Fiona has previously worked as an Outdoor Pursuits instructor, and a Public Rights of Way officer for Essex County Council. Outside of work, she enjoys

walking, running (slowly), reading and travelling with her family.

Angela Smith is the West Midlands Grants Officer for the Paths for Communities grant scheme and is the Natural England contact for LAFs in the region plus the Leicester City, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire LAFs. Her roles within Natural England have included working as the Lead Advisor in the West Midlands for Walking for Health. Outside of work, she enjoys walking and enjoys travelling with her family. She volunteers to promote the Retired Greyhound Trust the national greyhound re-homing charity for ex-racing greyhounds.



LAF News

Phil Robinson is the Natural England Lead Advisor responsible for the LAFs in the Yorkshire and the Humber, Lincolnshire and East Midlands regions. Phil is based in the Natural England office in Queen Street Leeds. Phil began his public service career in the State Veterinary Service working on the Tuberculosis and Brucellosis testing programmes. In 2001 he moved to the Rural Development Service where he helped deliver farm business diversification schemes. Since the formation of Natural England in 2006



Phil has been responsible for helping develop Educational Access opportunities within the Yorkshire and Humber Region. He is now, along with his LAF responsibilities, one of the Natural England team that is delivering the Paths for Communities Scheme.

Kevin Haugh, based in the Natural England office in Ashford, is the Paths for Communities and LAF contact for South East England. His previous roles in Natural England, and previous to that: the Countryside Agency, have included the HLF funded Local Heritage Initiative, Parish Plans, Affordable Rural Housing, and the Walking for Health programme. Outside work he is beginning to recapture travelling and a host of outdoor pursuits but in the meantime enjoys playing music, swimming and running, and striving to keep up with two teenage children.



Links

Contact us

enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk