

Photograph of Derbyshire by Jim Milner

LAF NEWS

2014/15

Issue 6

Welcome

Welcome to Issue 6 of the LAF newsletter and a personal hello from me as I step into Martin's shoes in helping to oversee our work with LAFs.

This newsletter comes at a challenging time for the organisation as we adapt to, and plan for, an increasingly stringent financial regime which has necessitated redefining many of our relationships with partners and stakeholders, including LAFs.

In February, it was with regret that we had to inform the LAFs that from April 2015, due to organisation-wide budget cuts, Natural England would no longer be able to fund the Regional Coordinator posts. LAF Regional Coordinators have been funded by Natural England (and previously the Countryside Agency) for 10 years including the original pilot project. Over that time they provided excellent support for the LAFs; gathering and disseminating information, organising and running regional meetings and conferences; cementing good relationships across boundaries and producing regional reports (available on Huddle) which in turn were used to better inform the [National LAF Annual Reports](#).

We would like to thank the Regional Coordinators for all of their hard work in supporting LAFs over the years and hope that, in the future, LAFs can forge strong working relationships with their local NE Area Team contacts.

I am looking forward to working with LAFs over the coming months

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to help create these new relationships and would also like to take this opportunity to thank Martin for all his hard work with you over the past few years.

Andy Mackintosh
Natural England

Moving on thoughts

By Martin Shaw, Senior Advisor, Access and Engagement Team

For the last three years I've had the privilege of helping to oversee and steer Natural England's involvement in the work of Local Access Forums. A lot has happened in this time. We've produced the first National Report to Defra featuring the work of LAFs, up and down the country. We've held National Conferences that have brought the LAF family together, providing outlets to share good practice and stimulate debate. We've improved the way we share information and expertise around the LAF family through regular newsletters and a vibrant, informative hub on Huddle.

We've faced and continue to face challenging financial times, but the work of LAFs, at the heart of the Access agenda, has never been more important. LAFs need to continue to find ways to engage in partnership with local organisations who share a common agenda, be they Health & Well Being Boards, Local Nature Partnerships or Natural England Area Teams.

My role will now be focussed on achieving the challenge of delivering the England Coast Path by 2020. This is an exciting move for me, but I also realise that this is one of many areas in which LAFs will have a part to play over the coming years. I look forward to the vital role that LAFs will be able to play, bringing their experience, knowledge, advice and partnership working as we seek to define the lines of the path around the country.

It's been a pleasure working with you, and I wish the LAFs every success in the future.

Footbridge at Colwick Country Park

By Hugh McClintock, Nottingham Local Access Forum

In 2010 the Nottingham LAF were asked to look at small scale projects to improve the local rights of way network by creating a missing link. As well as improving the network, the aim of the project was to give the LAF an insight into the design and build elements, associated costs, applying for statutory consents, consulting local residents and landowners, giving them an appreciation of a scheme from the initial idea through to completion, and how long these things take!

One member suggested building a timber footbridge across a minor watercourse known as "the Loop" (around 5m wide and 2

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feet deep during low water levels and 7m wide and 4 feet in flood) which is the old course of the River Trent, down-stream of Colwick Sluice Gates. The footbridge (20m in length) would link Colwick Country Park in Nottingham City to a large housing estate in Gedling Borough, Nottinghamshire. To cross the Loop, at the point where the footbridge would be built, there were (and still are) a set of “stepping stones” which were OK for the more physically mobile to use but proved difficult, and in some cases dangerous, for less mobile and elderly, especially during icy weather, plus when the main river flooded the stones were underwater. As can be seen



from the photo, the stepping stones (and now the footbridge) linked directly to well-worn desire lines on either side of the Loop, showing it was a key access point to and from the Country Park. A joint site visit was arranged with the Nottinghamshire LAF and all agreed that this scheme had merit and should be progressed.

Following the approval of funding from the Local Transport Plan in 2011, the project gained momentum and a design was prepared and submitted to the Environment Agency. The land on the Nottingham City / Country Park side was owned by Nottingham City Council so the footbridge didn't need planning permission under Permitted Development rules, but planning consent was required on the Gedling Borough side. This delayed things but finally, following receipt of all the statutory consents, wildlife surveys, and landowner agreements, construction started September 2014 and the footbridge was opened 2 months later in November.

Due to problems with access to the site for delivery, the footbridge was delivered in components parts and hand built in situ, which reduced the need for heavy lifting machinery and therefore reduced costs, disturbance to the nearby houses and those enjoying a peaceful day at the Country Park. A number of responses to the public consultation asked that the stepping stones were left in place because the local kids like playing on them.

This project shows that LAF's can and do make a difference to the

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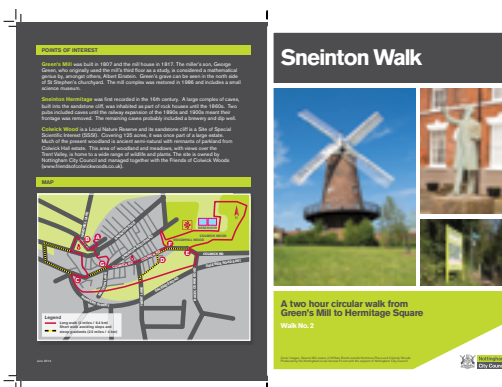
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local rights of way network and hopefully the Nottingham LAF now have a better understanding of how these projects develop over time, and perhaps more importantly, the art of patience, having taken the best part of 5 years to complete!



Self-guided walk leaflets

By John Lee, Public Rights of Way, Nottingham City Council

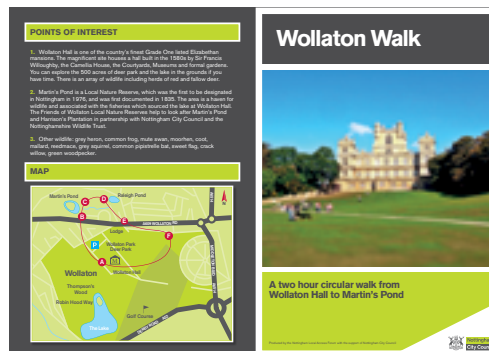


Over the last 2 years the Nottingham LAF has been developing a series of self-guided walk leaflets. The intention is to create one walk per Ward across Nottingham (depending on budgets) which range from moderate and easy to use, cover urban areas, green areas, parks and other open spaces and include a short history of the area,

any local characters and places of interest.

So far two walks have been published covering Wollaton Park and Martin's Pond (a nearby LNR) and Sneinton and Colwick Woods (another LNR), with a 3rd walk in the pipeline.

This is an excellent way of raising the profile and valuable work of the LAF while at the same time encouraging more exercise, improving health and wellbeing, while getting people out and about in Nottingham to discover what's on their doorstep.



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[A Walk in the Park](#)

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Campaign to improve safety for vulnerable users on rural roads

By Carole Bentley, Cheshire East Local Access Forum

Cheshire East Local Access Forum (CELAF) has won the support of several parish councils for its campaign to improve safety for vulnerable users on rural roads. The Forum organised a meeting in Mobberley (on January 14th) for parish councillors from the areas through which promoted long distance routes Lauren's Ride and the Cheshire Cycleway pass.

It was the first event of its kind organised by CELAF. Three Forum members - Linda Rose, John Handley and Carole Bentley - gave presentations on the dangers faced by horse riders, cyclists and walkers respectively in areas where they are forced to use country roads which generally have a 60mph speed limit. The meeting also heard from Kevin Skillings of Cheshire East Highways Department about the road safety challenges faced by the Department.



The impetus for the meeting came from Linda Rose, who is a horse rider and carriage driver. She said: "The number of accidents on rural roads is alarming so, with the help of parish councillors, CELAF wants to identify 'danger hotspots' and to come up with practical and attainable ideas for improvements. The response of so many of the parish councillors at the meeting was heartening and I do hope we can make some headway with this very difficult topic. We will be following up the meeting later in the year and looking into the possibility of organising similar events in other parts of Cheshire East."

Among the various issues raised by councillors in the general discussion were driver attitudes and training, speed limit

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consistency, reduced road maintenance and verge obstruction enforcement.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the parish councils of Chorley; Rainow; Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths; High Legh; Great Warford; Twemlow; Cranage; Over Alderley and Birtles; Nether Alderley and by Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC).

Adding collective value

By Ian Jackson, Northumberland Joint Local Access Forum

I suspect it may not be an isolated thought, but the question about how much value LAFs genuinely add as a collective was one that became a recurring theme to several members of the Joint Local Access Forum for the County of Northumberland and its National Park. Without doubt a few individuals on this Forum were adding considerable value in their contributions to specific local access issues and sometimes across a whole domain; e.g. mountain biking. But the nagging questions, especially to members who were relatively new, were: how can I make a difference; how much value is the whole JLAF adding; and is that whole greater than the sum of its parts?

At a regular JLAF meeting in July 2014 the question surfaced again and was translated into an action. Devise a new strategy and plan that not only allowed the day-to-day local specific access issues to be addressed, but come up with objectives which could engage a majority of JLAF members. Articulate a set of actions that recognised current access issues in Northumberland and at the same time better utilised the time and talents of JLAF members. Could (and should) we move JLAF from what several thought to be an ad hoc way of working to a more structured one?

A small working group of four took on the task. They first reviewed past strategies and action plans going back 6 years. That review revealed that the challenge was not just the need for a practical set of actions; it was also about whether JLAF had the appetite to discharge them. Nonetheless the working group looked at the access issues and produced a number of draft high level objectives and circulated these as a "strawman" to JLAF as a whole. A two hour session was then devised as a major item at the next JLAF meeting.

That meeting took place in December 2014. It opened with an introduction to the exercise and a resume of the issues and state of play. We then divided JLAF into two breakout groups and asked each to come up with no more than five practical objectives. They could use or adapt the strawman the working group had provided, or ignore it. The resulting objectives were then reconciled into one list and we asked JLAF to prioritise that list using post-it notes and a simple scoring system.

It was inevitable that an initial two hour session could only deliver agreement on high level objectives. The next task was to put practical flesh on those bones. This is the point we are at now. Via

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email each JLAF member has been asked to detail specific tasks, desired outcomes and timescales, which contribute to delivering the objectives. These tasks will be worked up into a draft prioritised action plan which we hope to agree at the next scheduled meeting in April.

As I write the responses from JLAF members are coming in and, ever the optimist, I'm hoping for a better than 66% response. Will we succeed in agreeing and delivering an effective action plan? I hope so. But at the very least we will have confronted a subject that was without doubt an elephant in the room and engaged a greater proportion of JLAF members in the work of the Forum than before. Given the importance of access and the potential contribution those members could make if well harnessed, surely that has to be good.

Getting out and about together

By Rachel Connolly – Chair, North Yorkshire Local Access Forum

North Yorkshire LAF are busy developing a project to encourage primary schools to get children out of their classrooms and into the countryside.

The idea is to produce a resource pack, which would include OS maps and other useful information regarding the local ROW network, that teachers could use to inform “outside the classroom” activities.

Teachers would use the resources to get pupils to explore the local footpath networks and learn about their importance. Activities could include nature studies using the hedgerows, learning how to read a map and learning about citizenship by adopting a path and keeping it tidy through litter picking.

Back in the classroom children could learn, using OS maps, about local history, the landscape changing through time and the origin of local place names. Children would learn why paths matter today and benefit from healthy outdoor activities.

North Yorkshire LAF are looking to work in partnership with Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Well Being Boards to help fund the initiative.

Other than the obvious educational and health benefits North Yorkshire LAF see the project as a means of promoting the rights of way network and its importance to the next generation.

Finding the missing link

By John Harker - Ex-Chairman, Rotherham Local Access Forum

Public bridleway networks generally are often poor in terms of length of mileage, and in connectivity of the network for higher rights users. Rotherham metropolitan borough is no exception to that rule.

When I was Chairman of the LAF a number of years ago, the

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mysterious case of Bridleway 18, parish of Aston cum Aughton, was well known to me. It runs north-east south-west in countryside to the east of the M1 motorway near Junction 33. At its southern end it 'dead ends' at a junction with Public Footpath 16. There is no way through for horse riders or cyclists. Public Footpath 16 has stiles on it, so "unofficial" use was not feasible either thus preventing any claim to upgrade Footpath 16 on the basis of user evidence.

The obvious answer, at least to me, was to upgrade that part of Footpath 16 through to Hardwick Lane by means of a Public Path Creation Order on the basis of a clear need. Officers were concerned about the implications of such a course of action in terms of the compensation liable to be paid to a landowner under section 26 of the Highways Act 1980. The LAF pressed for a land valuation to give us a clearer idea of the scale of the financial cost. Eventually a Valuation Officer was taken out by the rights of way staff to walk 2 possible options – Footpath 16 and the unmade track past Vessey Close Cottages from Vessey Close Farm. The answer that came back was revealing to say the least.

£900 to upgrade a section of Footpath 16; £0 to upgrade the private access track to Vessey Close Cottages and farm. This gave the project massive impetus. Rights of Way staff could now 'sell' the project to senior officers and councillors. Protracted negotiations with the 2 landowners involved to try & reach a compromise agreement without the need for the risk of a contested public inquiry eventually failed, but the owner of Vessey Close Farm where the bridleway currently passes through his yard did reluctantly offer a compromise solution.

In return for a legal diversion which removed the bridleway from the working farmyard, he offered a brand new public footpath which would connect from the bridleway to the bridge crossing of the M1 motorway. This would maintain the link for walkers between the bridleway and the bridge over the M1 without having to walk a large detour. Riders and cyclists would now have a through route from Brampton to Hardwick where other bridleways and unclassified roads can be accessed.

The proposed routes of diverted bridleway & new footpath have been walked & given the OK by LAF members from walking and horse riding backgrounds. All that is needed are the Public Path Orders under s.25 & s.119 to bring them into effect. One hesitates to say it's all over bar the shouting, but we are closer now than we have ever been. Surely no one is going to object to the Orders are they? Watch this space.

Black Environment Network

By Kathy Miles, North West Regional LAF Coordinator

On 12th February the Northwest Regional LAF Chairs welcomed to their meeting Saleem Oppal and Max Ghani from the Black Environment Network (BEN). Each has in excess of 30 years' experience of working with ethnic communities and this was certainly apparent from the many examples and anecdotes related over the course of their interesting presentation on "Positive Engagement" which was well received and resulted in some good discussion, with attendees relating some very relevant anecdotes

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from their own experiences.

Changing the name has been thought about – but everyone knows them as BEN. They are also now thinking about international work; and the training element of their work is becoming more sought after as interest in this area increases. Access and Engagement Lead Advisor David Jeffreys first contacted BEN and then made a successful bid for funding so that a training event could be organised for the Northwest LAFs. This is now to be held shortly, in early March in Manchester, with a number of LAF members attending from all over the region. The training will relate more closely to the role of LAFs and it is hoped will benefit those LAFs represented. It should prove particularly relevant for the many essentially urban LAFs in the southern half of the Northwest. However, there are minority groups and communities as well as individuals living throughout the region, and also visitors and migrant workers from around the world.

We hope to include a followup article on the training event in the next issue of LAF News.

Annual reporting and survey

By Rob Leek - Lead Adviser, Natural England

A new version of the Annual Review Form for LAFs to use when reporting to Natural England was recently circulated to all of the LAFs via the Regional Coordinators. Completing this form enables Natural England to receive information from LAFs in a consistent format which assists when preparing the LAF National Annual Report which will be submitted to Defra. Any feedback about the form or if it's required in a different format, please contact LAF@naturalengland.org.uk.

For the last couple of years, Natural England has organised an online survey for LAF Chairs and Secretaries to complete which aims to capture information from LAFs that is not always received via the annual reporting process. Natural England are aiming to run the survey again this year in April and information from it will, as before, be used in the National Annual Report. Details about the survey will be circulated to all of the LAF secretaries nearer the time.

What's hot on Huddle

By Rob Leek - Lead Adviser, Natural England

A spreadsheet has recently been uploaded to Huddle which contains current links to local authority rights of way and ROWIP webpages. The spreadsheet also has ROWIP start/end dates, where known, and whether it is an initial or subsequent plan. It is hoped it will be of use for information on local plans and as an overview of the wider national ROWIP picture.

The spreadsheet is work in progress and not all the links or dates may be live or 100% accurate but we will update it periodically and would welcome any corrections or additions.

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Huddle specific links

[Annual Review Form](#)
[Survey Results 2014](#)
[Survey Results 2013](#)

[National Annual Reports](#)

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[ROWIP List](#)

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