

LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM – 6 OCTOBER 2015

A PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE PERMISSIVE ACCESS IN STEWARDSHIP SCHEMES

REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF previously placed the report “The Future of Higher Level Stewardship Permissive Access” on HUDDLE. Since the report has been on HUDDLE the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF have been made aware of other LAFs concerned with the loss of all permissive access funding by the end of 2020. The current permissive access sites receiving funding are displayed in appendix A. This draft report has been drawn up by consultation with the Mid and West Berkshire LAF. Other LAFs including South Downs National Park, Worcestershire, Leicestershire, Mid Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire LAF have expressed an interest and are being consulted on the content of the report.
- 1.2. The aim is to create a joint report covering all our interests. It is felt important to get this right, as it may be the last opportunity local access forums have to make a change in Government and CAP policy in relation to funding permissive access.
- 1.3. The report and consultation document can then be dispersed through the regions of those LAFs mentioned above. The responses from the consultations coming back to the South Linc’s and Rutland LAF for summarising. Following analysis of the consultation document the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF will make the decision on how to take the project forward. One option which will be investigated is whether the Final Report and consultation document should be sent to all LAFs, so all can have a say on the subject.

2. THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1. Create a body representing local access forums on this matter of National interest. This may be as discussed in the draft report “Making our needs known and influencing decision makers” recommending creating England Access Forum (EAF) team to move the project forward.
- 2.2. EAF or a similar body representing all LAFs interests to:
 - 2.2.1. Influence Government to provide immediate funding for “easy access” routes, as it is recognised that there are very few opportunities for countryside access for the disabled. Details for this proposal can be found in appendix B.
 - 2.2.2. Influence Government and CAP to include funding permissive access on 10 year agreements for perpetuity to be bound into the 2021 CAP agreement and all the following CAP agreements, provided we are still part of the EEC. To ensure the LAFs have the best chance of success in this matter it will be necessary to start working on this action in 2016.
 - 2.2.3. Influence Government to create a reasonable size pot of money, for funding permissive access. Urban LAFs may not have any HLS sites so they should have the option where they can then donate their funding to their neighbouring LAF. However the urban LAF should have a say in where the money is spent. This is to ensure people in their area benefit from the permissive route, as it would be one of the routes their users would be most likely to use e.g. close to the urban area as a link to the PRoW network.

- 2.2.4. Influence Government to allocate the pot of money available in accordance with the highway authority's area of land. With the highway authorities with the lowest land area being provided with a reasonable sum to ensure they can provide a reasonable amount of permissive routes.
- 2.2.5. Influence Government to announce the allocation percentage for each LAF by 2019, the minimum funds for small (by area) highway authorities and maximum funds for large (by area) highway authorities.
- 2.2.6. Influence Government to pass the responsibility for awarding permissive access funding to the LAFs. This is due to the LAFs having the knowledge of the access requirements of the locality. Hence the LAF will be responsible for the proportion of types of permissive routes in their LAF area. DEFRA would still be responsible for actual payment to landowners/farmers.
- 2.2.7. Influence Government to create a permissive access rate for restricted bridleways.
- 2.2.8. Influence Government to maintain a web site for all permissive routes in a format similar to the current permissive access web site <http://cwr.naturalengland.org.uk/walk-ride.aspx>
- 2.2.9. Influence Government to create the option of the opportunity to upgrade PRoW to a higher level status through permissive access payments, whilst protecting its PRoW status, see appendix C.

3. **FUNDING**

We are fully aware of the current financial climate and the reduction in Government and local authority budgets but by the Government's own admission, an improvement in public health would reduce the costs to the NHS by having a healthier population. There is now overwhelming evidence that accessing the countryside helps improve individual's general health and wellbeing. Natural England in their presentation "The benefits of Nature for Health and Wellbeing" (<http://letnaturefeedyoursenses.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-downloads/NE-HealthWellbeing-SarahPreston.pdf>) displays the need for more access to the countryside. So with these issues in mind this report is designed to provide recommendations which can be delivered in our current financial climate and plan for what should happen in the future whether we are still in EEC or not. Whilst the current financial climate exists it is understood that DEFRA will find it difficult to fund further routes until the CAP agreement 2021. In order for LAFs to fund further permissive routes prior to the new CAP agreement, Natural England should provide training and assistance for LAFs to access suitable funding streams, such as LEADER funding through Local Action Groups, to enable them to offer payments for permissive access.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Funded Permissive Access Routes.

Appendix B – Easy Access Routes.

Appendix C – Consultation Questions.