

**EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL CHAIRS' MEETING**

**MINUTES**

**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 11am**

**Location: Natural England Offices, Whittle Room, Apex Court, Nottingham**

**Attendees**

Hugh McClintock	Nottingham LAF	East Mid's Chair
Mary Mills	Nottinghamshire LAF	
Bob Eglinton	Leicester LAF	
Terry Kirby	Leicestershire LAF	
John Law	South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF	
Christopher Padley	Mid Lincolnshire LAF	
Kristina Gould	Natural England	

**Apologies for absence**

Edwina Edwards	Peak District LAF
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**1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was agreed that in item 6 of the previous minutes, all references to National Rail should be changed to Network Rail.

**2. HOW WE CHAIR AND TAKE MINUTES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was felt that it was more appropriate that the chair of the meeting should chair a minimum of two meetings, this would create an element of consistency. Hugh was asked and agreed to chair the next meeting in March.

As the role of LAF Coordinator had disappeared the method of minute taking came under discussion. It was agreed that the LAF representatives should send details to the minute taker, to enable the minute taker to copy and paste LAF round ups and other topics into the minutes. John agreed to minute the meeting.

### **3. NATURAL ENGLAND UPDATE**

KRISTINA GOULD's UPDATE FROM NATURAL ENGLAND;

Welcome to Apex Court and the Nottingham Office . Natural England is very happy to host the Regional LAF Char's meetings here in future.

#### NEWSLETTER

Rob Leek at Natural England has provided an update and is pleased to report that- 'Newsletter' Issue 7 is now available.(please see Huddle)

Your contact is [LAF@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:LAF@naturalengland.org.uk)

#### ANNUAL REPORTS

Thanks for the Annual Reports from individual LAFs. The East Midlands LAF response was very good.. Natural England will report to Defra through a **LAF 2014 - 2015 National Annual Report** with the aim to submit it to Defra by the end of Sept. 2015.

From the LAF Surveys done back in April 2015-statistics will soon be available.

#### NATIONAL CONFERENCE

It is hoped that a NATIONAL Conference will be held -expected end Feb/early March 2016. Location/s yet to be decided and there may be a North and a South Conference. Hull being one a possibility.

#### HUDDLE or not?

A request for feedback on Huddle was sought at the meeting. This is an area for potential training. Other social networking opportunities may exist and may be explored if there is a demand.

#### Huddle or alternative?

Natural England are currently consulting all LAF Huddle members for their views and suggestions about whether an alternative social media platform (for example, Facebook/Google-Drive) might be more suitable for LAFs than Huddle. To join in the discussion on HUDDLE or if you would prefer, email them to [LAF@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:LAF@naturalengland.org.uk).

If you have any questions about or problems using Huddle please contact [rob.leek@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:rob.leek@naturalengland.org.uk)

### **4. MAKING OUR NEEDS KNOWN AND INFLUENCING DECISION MAKERS REPORT AND CONSULTATION**

John raised this item, stating that the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF raised a number of issues which they thought were of national importance. They had also seen through HUDDLE other LAFs raising issues of national importance but due to only one LAF raising the issue, the response received from the organisations they had addressed their concerns to seemed dismissive. The South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF thought the only way LAFs were going to be listened to on national issues, was if the majority of LAFs showed their concern and that concern was expressed as one

voice to the relevant body. The report presented explores this option. With the report is a consultation document. The LAFs in the East Midlands are requested to complete the consultation document and return to John for the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF to analyse the completed documents. It was explained that the LAFs in the South East and West Midlands were also being asked to take part in the survey. All the LAFs in the survey were being asked for the date the reports were going to be discussed. Once the latest date is known the deadline would be one month after that meeting had taken place. Only the consultation documents received by that date would be analysed. Any LAF not returning the document by that date would be recorded as “happy with the current process and do not feel change is necessary”.

***ACTION: LAF Chairs – To provide John with the date of their next LAF meeting***

***LAF Chairs – To place this item for discussion at their next LAF meeting***

***LAF Chairs – To complete the consultation document following their LAF meeting and return the form to John***

## **5. PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE PERMISSIVE ACCESS IN STEWARDSHIP SCHEMES REPORT AND CONSULTATION**

John stated that the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF felt that permissive access in stewardship schemes was an example of a national issue. A number of other LAFs had raised concerns about this topic. A report and consultation document had been prepared with the Mid and West Berkshire LAF. John asked if the East Mid's LAFs could complete the consultation document and follow the same process as in item 4 above.

***ACTION: LAF Chairs – To place this item for discussion at their next LAF meeting***

***LAF Chairs – To complete the consultation document following their LAF meeting and return the form to John***

## **6. NETWORK RAIL – THE CLOSURE OF SO MANY LEVEL CROSSINGS**

Terry outlined the situation in Leicestershire, and mentioned the figures compiled by his colleague Stan Warren. General discussion followed. It was stated that there are hundreds of examples of problems associated with this around the country.

Network Rail seemed to be putting pressure on local authorities to make Closure Orders. There was a 4 day Public Enquiry in Lincoln recently, which exposed Network Rail's methods. Their risk assessment methodology appeared to be skewed in favour of declaring crossings dangerous and there is no proper assessment of the available alternatives. It was felt that these sort of issues need highlighting nationally.

Kristina mentioned that John Hares is the Network Rail manager dealing level crossings in our region.

## **7. PROJECT FUNDING SOURCES**

John mentioned the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF had the opportunity from Natural England to bid for funding for their Countryside for All projects. Unfortunately they were unsuccessful but they were very conscious that other LAFs had not been given this opportunity. Kristina explained that the funding pot was from the Natural England Innovation fund and applications were by invitation only. John raised the point that obtaining funding for projects is getting more difficult and although the LAFs are aware of the main funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery, getting to know of one off funding is difficult and it would be helpful if Natural England could inform the LAFs of these funding announcements. Kristina agreed to take this back to Natural England to see if this could be put in place.

***ACTION: Kristina – Investigate whether the LAFs can be made aware of relevant funding streams, including one off funding announcements***

## **8. MEGA DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON PROW**

Terry quoted several examples from Leicestershire – MIRA, Magna Park, Bardon Hill, Garendon, Airfield Farm, Lubbethorpe, Castle Donington and Kegworth and their possible effects on PROW, etc. Nottinghamshire would tend to negotiate for the best alternative routes for such diversions. There are likely to be cutbacks in relevant section 106 and private sector contributions. The present Government is going backwards in terms of sustainability.

LAFs find working with many planning authorities very frustrating. Those authorities view sustainability issues as sideshows. These things may require a more strategic approach, rather than just sticking a footpath around the edge of a new development, etc.

The statutory agencies often don't carry out proper consultations. Highways England and its' predecessors have often completely ignored sustainability issues, but they're getting better. We need to work with them. Highways England are about to produce revised guidance on Planning for Cyclists. They also have a dedicated fund for cycling schemes on trunk roads.

## **9. LAF ROUND UPS**

### **NOTTINGHAM LAF**

Progress made on ROWIP2: should now go to the City Council's Executive Board on 22 September for final approval.

Self-Guided Walks sub-group – nearly completed 3<sup>rd</sup> walk – and the draft of a further one is now being discussed, for the area west of the City Centre including The Park Estate and Lenton.

Historical ROWs sub-group – looking in the archives. Subgroup under Chris Thompson making good use of the now expanded Archive facilities, particularly with regard to paths in the City Centre.

Have had interesting speakers at LAF meetings including, at our last meeting, Katie Westacott on the work of Living Streets and 2 speakers from the City Council for a discussion on the issues of illegal and obstructive car parking, and related enforcement issues. Our next meeting will include a

discussion with John Bann, recently appointed Cycling and Public Spaces Enhancement Officer, on the Cycling Ambition Grant proposals, on which the first consultation has recently taken place.

Planning Policy sub-group – current work to assess the rights of way implications for development and redevelopment includes a further application for housing in the major Waterside regeneration area with implications for the aim of extending the north bank riverside path all the way from Victoria Embankment and Trent Bridge to Colwick Park on the east side of the Nottingham area.

Proposed foot-cycle bridge projects across the Trent between Trent Lane and The Hook (Lady Bay, West Bridgford), close to Colwick Park and the National Water Sports Centre and Country Park at Holme Pierrepont. To help strengthen and complete the feasibility study, in cooperation with the City and County Councils, further specialised work is to be commissioned, possibly from Sustrans, on the economic case, and detailed predictions of bridge usage by walkers, cyclists and runners, for both leisure and commuting purposes and with reference to the major housing development plans both north and south of the river. The Steering Group, which has representatives from several different groups, including Nottingham Civic Society, Pedals (Nottm Cycling Campaign) and Blueprint Regeneration, is also very keen to learn from the detailed experience of planning, designing and implementing the apparently very successful Sustrans Diglis Bridge over the Severn in Worcester, funded under the Sustrans Connect 2 (Lottery) Project, with support from the local City and County Councils. We are considering arranging a design competition to help generate different design options for the bridge and its approaches as has happened recently with similar projects in London and Bath.

### **NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LAF**

Nottinghamshire LAF continues to fulfil its basic functions, but does little on a proactive basis. I am (as Chair) in the slightly awkward position of being on a temporary contract with my County Council working in the Countryside Access team. This is good from the point of view of knowing what is going on and what the day to day problems are, but is obviously not “proper” for the independence of the LAF. I am hoping someone else will come forward and take on the LAF role shortly.

The main work our forum has been involved in recently has been Level Crossing closures: East Coast Main Line, Local, and controversial emergency closures, all of which were discussed in some detail at the meeting.

The LAF are very concerned by changes at the CC the Highways section is to be out sourced to a company who are based in Cornwall. Maintenance and Maintenance management will go to the new company but Def Map and Enforcement work will stay with the Council. It is expected that the LAF will continue to work with the Authority but that we may have limited contact and very limited impact on the new company. We intend to do as much as we can to get our voice heard, but never feel that we have much clout in these sort of matters!

Several members are to undertake basic R of Way training shortly and we also intend to offer members the chance to attend a course on how to claim historic paths.

As with other LAFs we have several councillors (3) on our forum but they rarely attend, being cynical, probably only when they have a particular issue they wish to raise.

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan or (Rights of Way Management Plan) as our council have renamed it! Is still at the draft stage, LAF members have read the draft and commented, it is now awaiting some minor amendment before going on to the next stage!

### **LEICESTER LAF**

Leicester LAF has only a small membership and is limited as to what it can cover.

Most focus over the last 6 months has been on consultation/ site visits etc. associated with proposals arising from the elected mayor's "Connecting Leicester" scheme, other developments such as the new bus station, and from the two city-located universities. Two recurring problem areas: firstly there is no detailed overarching "Connecting Leicester" plan to provide a context for individual proposals; secondly the quality of details regarding access for cyclists, and pedestrians with vision or mobility disabilities in schemes already implemented are not to a standard we would expect or had indicated during consultation.

There has been a "get walking, keep walking" project in place managed by a dedicated staff member of the local Rambler Association. We will invite her to a forthcoming forum meeting to review the success as scheme funding comes towards its end and consider ways of continuing the programme.

### **LEICESTERSHIRE LAF**

Terry mentioned Leicestershire LAF's work with Lost Ways. He also mentioned the involvement of Councillors and the structure of the LAF. It was felt that Lost Ways research can be done by anyone who had been provided with the appropriate training. The LAF should facilitate and support this.

Some confusion as to the role of the LAF has been observed among colleagues and the general public. To try to deal with this, the LAF considered a change of name, possibly with a relevant strapline. If a decision was made to change the name, e.g. to the Countryside Access Forum, it was thought we would need to retain the title 'Local Access Forum' in the strap line.

### **SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE AND RUTLAND LAF**

The Lost Ways project is a joint project with the Mid Lincolnshire LAF. The sub group undertaking this project have finalised their remit for the project. This will be presented to both LAFs for their approval. Discussions have taken place in relation to how we carry out the project. Rutland is fortunate to have two members of the Leicestershire and Rutland who are undertaking the task of recording and mapping unrecorded ways. This will enable the sub group to follow the Leicestershire LAF process to identify unrecorded ways to research. Unfortunately the sub group does not currently have anyone that has the capacity to record and map this base data. We are looking to see how we can remedy this.

The report and consultation document "Making our needs known and influencing decision makers" was prepared in conjunction with the Mid and West Berkshire LAF. This came about through both LAFs concern of the ending of permissive access funding for stewardship schemes. Whilst both LAFs had raised their concern, one with Natural England the other with DEFRA, it was felt that due to the LAFs not having a united voice the topics did not get pursued further. We then realised we needed to examine how we could change this situation. The report and consultation document is the outcome of our work so far on this project.

The report and consultation document “Proposal for future permissive access in stewardship schemes” was also prepared in conjunction with the Mid and West Berkshire LAF. The aim is to find out whether other LAFs felt more should be done to retain payment for permissive access and if there is sufficient interest how to move the project forward.

The Countryside For All project is a joint project with the Mid Lincolnshire LAF. With support from council members and officers from both county councils, Lincolnshire Sport and Lincolnshire district councils we have continued deliver improved countryside access. One project we have had to put on hold because of our workload is cycling in the countryside for the disabled. Our countryside for all projects include:

- a. Countryside for all routes
  - i. Provided advice on four route improvements
  - ii. Investigating funding for three route improvements
  - iii. Investigating funding opportunities to deliver inclusive countryside access training to other organisations.
- b. Countryside for all route literature
  - i. Received funding of approximately £2800 for design, artwork and printing of ten routes for this financial year.
  - ii. Four new routes to be audited and printed this year.
  - iii. Six of the original routes to be re printed due to diminished stock.
  - iv. Investigating funding for route literature for three Rutland routes.
  - v. Investigating funding pots for 2016/17 routes and route literature
- c. Dementia friendly walks
  - i. Over fifty walk leaders/coordinators trained
  - ii. Investigating obtaining funding for further dementia friendly walk leader training for both Lincolnshire and Rutland.
- d. Clinical Commissioning Groups
  - i. Provided a slide show for the CCGs to encourage their GP practices to display in their waiting rooms promoting countryside for all routes, dementia friendly walks, walking for health, walking PRow and other walking opportunities .
  - ii. Slide show presented to two CCGs
  - iii. Plans to deliver the slide show to the remaining Lincolnshire CCGs and East Leicestershire and Rutland CCG

### **MID LINCOLNSHIRE LAF**

The LAF continues to play an important role working on joint projects with the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF, which include the lost ways project and the countryside for all project. The details of this are provided in the South Lincolnshire and Rutland round up.

There is concern that the Definitive Map Modification Orders which are being processed is focussing on tidying up anomalies and this is eating into the PRow budget.

The Coastal Countryside Park has LAF representation on its working group. The working group are continuing to identify improvements required. Some of the proposals from the working group have already been implemented.

Natural England are delivering a presentation to a joint LAF meeting of the Mid Lincolnshire LAF and the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF relating to coastal access at our next meeting in October.

#### **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Chris mentioned that roadside verges are often not considered as important routes but many link PRoW. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust is investigating the frequency of mowing verges. If the frequency of mowing is reduced this could have an impact on footways which are beaten tracks on verges.

#### **11. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting should be at the same location, the Natural England offices at Apex Court, Nottingham. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> March were chosen as suitable dates. The actual date of the meeting will be confirmed following announcement of the LAF conference. Hugh asked the members present, if it would be helpful to invite a speaker to our next meeting and suggested a representative from Sustrans. All were in favour of inviting Sustrans to the meeting. It was felt that the March meeting should start at 10:30am with a 3:30pm finish. This would ensure an appropriate amount of time could be reserved for the speaker to deliver the presentation and have a question and answer session.

***ACTION: Hugh – Invite a speaker from Sustrans for the March meeting - DONE***

*Kristina – Book Apex Court meeting room and car park spaces provisionally for both dates in March - DONE*