

Leicestershire Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2015

The Access Forum is an independent statutory body that brings together the different interests concerned with public rights of way and countryside access, including farmers and landowners, conservationists and users such as walkers and riders.

Membership

Chairman – Mr Terry Kirby

Current membership	Field/Area of Interest
Ms Vicky Allen	Equestrian, Tourism.
Ms Heather Brown	Walking, Road Cycling, Climbing.
Ruth Camamile CC	County Councillor.
Mr Roy Denney	District Councillor (Blaby).
Mr Chris Faircliffe (Vice-Chair)	Youth activities, Health promotion, Environment.
Mr Michael Gamble	Cycling.
Mr Anthony Hillier-Fry	Landowners, Walking, Tourism.
Mr John Howells	Walking.
Mr John Law	Walking, Cycling, Disabled, Disadvantaged groups, Environment.
Mrs Alexandra Pyper	Equestrian, Tourism, Landowners.
Mr Brian Sutton	Farming, Landowners, Motor users.
Mr Paul Tame	Farming, Equestrian.
Mr Stan Warren	Walking, Disabled.

Contact Information

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The meetings covered by this report were held on –

14th January 2015

16th April 2015

2nd July 2015

6th October 2015

Chairman's Foreword

This is my first year as the Chairman of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LAF) after taking over from Roy Denney in January. It has been another busy year for the Forum discussing and tackling a wide variety of issues in relation to recreational access and land use.

We could do with more support from Natural England. We need help to get local planning authorities to consult with us, as many of them, at District or Borough level, seem to think we're part of the County Council, and don't like what they see as interference from that direction. We do a great deal with very few resources. If only we had more resources, just think what more we could achieve!

I really enjoy the challenge of this role, and the chance to work with such wonderfully skilled, caring and dedicated people. I'm still learning a lot, which is great, and the support and occasional constructive criticism I've had from the County Council is something I've found really valuable.

Below you will find a summary of the work undertaken by our sub-groups, our priorities for 2016 and the comments of the Appointing Authority.

Terry Kirby
Chairman



Review of the year

We have made a number of site visits to such venues as country parks and major development sites. We've made constructive comments and worked with the managers of those venues to try to secure the best possible outcomes at the sites for all users of rights of way, and encourage more such users.

We continue to be represented on other relevant organisations, thus increasing our sphere of influence. And we invite major organisations, developers, etc., to our meetings to facilitate positive discussions. We advise local government on strategic plans and frameworks, and have commented officially on a number of substantial planning applications which could impact on rights of way or afford opportunities to improve the network.

We have also continued to promote Countryside For All, a comprehensive guide to opportunities for people who are less able bodied to enjoy the countryside.

We also work with and advise numerous other bodies and have advised several district and borough councils especially in the areas of open spaces, rights of way and access to them. Throughout the year we have submitted our comments to a number of district councils in the process of drafting their local plans regarding the importance of open access.

We monitored all major developments and try to ensure that any impacts on the rights of way network are beneficial to the public.

Earlier in the year we received a presentation from Leicestershire County Council officers on the cycle training schemes delivered across the County. This informative presentation was part of our wider investigation into the use of Shared Spaces.

Summary from Sub-groups

Network Opportunities Committee

I Chair the Network Opportunities Committee, this committee works to enhance the network of the public rights of way. We have sub groups working on a number of projects, including unrecorded ways, open access land, countryside for all, county farms and higher level stewardship.

The unrecorded ways project was created to identify unrecorded ways and ensure sufficient historic evidence is available to submit a claim for a route, to enable it to become a permanent public right of way. Although we have been able to set up the processes and gather all the base data we have been waiting for the Deregulation Bill to go through Parliament to see how it may impact on our work. The Bill was passed earlier this year, we are now awaiting the guidelines from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural



Affairs to provide a clearer understanding of how we need to proceed. There are a number of activities we are undertaking to ensure we are in the best possible position to carry out the necessary research and submissions by the 2026 deadline. This includes working with other organisations interested in this project such as the Leicestershire Footpaths Association, Charnwood Roots and the Ramblers. We are also prioritising routes from our base data for research.

Open access land surveys took place at Burrough Hill and Burbage Common. Open access land is where the public normally have a right of access on foot, details are displayed in the Countryside and Rights Of Way (CROW) Act 2000. Reports relating to the findings have been presented to the County Council. The Burbage Common report has also been presented to the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough council.

The Countryside for All project, is where we are aiming to improve countryside access for people with limited mobility. Some issues can easily be resolved such as changing a style for a gate. Other issues include, encouraging land owners with public access to provide information to enable people with limited mobility to be able to make a judgement on whether the route is suitable for them. We continue to work with different organisations to improve countryside access for the disabled.

The county farms project is where we annually examine Leicestershire County Council farmland prior to tenancy renewal. This is carried out to see if there are any opportunities for improving the public right of way network. The sub group provides the County Council with their recommendations on an annual basis.

Higher level stewardship access is where a route is funded by DEFRA through Natural England. In 2010 Natural England announced this funding would end when the individual access funding agreements ended their term. Annually the LAF write to parishes reminding them of the land in their area, where funding is due to end in that year. The letter suggests, if the parish feel there is a need to keep the route open as it is believed to be a valuable route, they should discuss the situation with the land owner, to see if permissive access can be continued. All funding for this element of permissive access will cease after 2020.

John Law

Planning and Travel Committee

COME AND JOIN US

A lot of our work can be tedious and time consuming but those of us with the time feel we need to keep nudging other parties in the right direction. We can get very involved and



perhaps too close to issues and it is important that the LLAF has a mix of people who, even if they cannot commit to day to day projects, can bring their ideas to the table and ensure we are still pursuing the aims and ambitions of the wider population

We continue to monitor the Network Rail crossings situation and await developments re HS2. This company did say they would engage with us as the project unfolds and whatever we think of the overall project it is important to work with them to mitigate the impacts as it will cut 64 rights of way in our County. As for rail crossings Network Rail wish to speed up their traffic and want to close many of what we think are, in the large part, perfectly safe footpath crossings. We have engaged with them on some of these but have formally lodged objections where we feel they are putting their costs in front of the public need.

We also work with and advise numerous other bodies and have advised several district and borough councils especially in the areas of open spaces, rights of way and access to them.

We monitor all major developments and try and insure that any impacts on the rights of way network are beneficial to the public.

Members represent the Forum on many outside groups trying to influence them in the provision of safe access to the countryside and we get involved with numerous national consultations and campaign for the public right to enjoy our inheritance.

The Forum wishes to be representative of all users of the countryside and landowners and environmentalists but whilst we can have up to 21 members some sectors are not represented. Those of us on the Forum wear many hats and we are all interested in the environment but we do not have anybody directly involved with groups working in that field. We are also short at the moment of people particularly interested in motor sport or cycling. Nor do we currently have members of the ethnic minorities or the less able sector.

We only meet about five times a year formally so it is not a great demand on your time so why not come along as a visitor and see what we get up to. I have made it seem a bit dry but we do actually have some very enjoyable times. We take on various projects and over the last couple of years have been visiting all the open access areas and reporting to the County on any defects found. This usually involves a couple of hours walking round some of the county's wilder areas with likeminded people and often then going to a local hostelry to discuss our findings over a snack.

The role does get us involved with all sorts of agencies and really puts us in the loop. Why not see if it is something you could enjoy and contribute to.

Roy Denney



OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE

As a result of the provisions of the CROW Act 2000 'lost ways' and 'forgotten footpaths' will be lost for ever if they are not claimed by the end of 2025. The network is a bit of a nonsense. For example we have situations where one path from A to B went through three parishes and two recorded it but the middle one did not so legally we have a break in the line.

It is thought that nationally there are at least 20,000 public rights of way not formally recorded, many having been established centuries ago. We would like to get these registered down the road but the initial priority is to seek suggestions of lost routes which would enhance the network and join up missing links and then look for the evidence to support a request for them to be registered and opened up.

This can be fascinating. If you like poring over old maps or delving into historic archives then we need your help. If you are still an active walker you will know where anomalies occur in your local path network

We are at the stage of identifying routes to research. Some work has been done by the use of the Leicestershire County Record Office on-line catalogue and the National Record Office online search facility, to locate copies of potential evidence to support a claim. We have also had a meeting with the County Record Office staff at Wigston.

All the work in Leicestershire is being driven by a working party we have set up within the LAF. These members are also involved with such organisations as the Ramblers Association, The Leicestershire Footpaths Association, The British Horse Society and the Leicestershire & Rutland Bridleways Association. The working party includes people co-opted from outside the Forum.

Potential routes are being mapped by one of these volunteers, using Viewranger, linking the maps to a master index. The maps created can be exported to researchers and other interested parties, such as the Highway Authority. All documents checked during research, even if producing no evidence, will be recorded on a Research Evidence Sheet, which will be stored linked to the master index.

This time consuming work is now almost complete, although we still have to check the old "Cassini" map reprints, comparing them with the up to date Ordnance Survey maps of the same area and then we can get down to interesting bit trying to identify paths that have been lost by scouring old large scale OS maps going back into the nineteenth century and other relevant documents, maps and plans. Our next step will be to prioritise routes which appear to be of public benefit, particularly if they are under threat by developments and volunteer



researchers will then be engaged in collecting evidence to support claims. If you would like to get involved with this research activity we would be interested to hear from you and can expand on ways which you might be able to get involved. We will probably hold a meeting of all volunteers at County Hall to spell everything out.

What you can also do

- We need to know where to look for forgotten footpaths, which as locals, the public can suggest
- Do you use paths, which have been used for ages but which are not shown on OS Maps as Rights of Way?
- Do you use 'White Roads/ County Roads' which have never been classified as public?
- Do you know of footpaths or bridleways which terminate on a parish or county boundary?

Stan Warren

Verges Committee

Highway verges should not only be attractive to look at but a lifeline to vulnerable road users; from narrow country lanes where they are often the only place to go to avoid large vehicles and machinery to the A roads with traffic that is too fast and frequent for them to use the carriageway safely. This applies most especially to horse riders. The majority of our verges grow summer vegetation in abundance which renders them difficult to use by walkers, horse riders or cyclists especially as this masks holes and hazardous objects, making them unsafe to use until the next verge cutting. The Verges Group met with the County Ecologist who said that only a small percentage of verges in Leicestershire qualify for conservation grade - those with special soils growing rare flora or housing rare, endangered fauna. These few verges are noted and signed but a low level of foot or hoof fall is unlikely to affect their conservation value and in some cases may help. The reduction in the wide mowing programme is of concern as this will allow various thug species to take over and, in time, obstruct the verge as a useful part of the highway and obliterate many species that make up the 'typical' verge."

Priorities for 2016

We will continue to monitor major developments in Leicestershire to ensure that rights of way are protected in the county. One of the major developments facing Leicestershire is HS2 which we will be monitoring closely due to the significant impact it will have on open spaces and land across Leicestershire.



We will continue promoting, and hopefully developing, Countryside For All, and encouraging more use of Access Areas, rights of ways, etc., by sectors of the population currently underrepresented among users. We promote access for everyone, including people with disabilities, different ethnic groups, horse riders, users of bicycles and public transport (PT), etc. This includes problems experienced on shared routes.

We will continue to monitor significant developments across Leicestershire to ensure provision for rights of way are maintained. Furthermore there are a number of transport and highway schemes designed to maximise economic growth which we hope we can contribute to by encouraging shared spaces for commuting.

Comments of the Appointing Authority

As usual we continue to be impressed by the enthusiasm of the volunteers sitting on the Forum, and we hope we can support them as much as possible in the future. At a time when local government is undergoing a period of change and experiencing significant resource pressures, we welcome passionate volunteers who want to make Leicestershire a place which can be equally enjoyed by all.

Join the Leicestershire Local Access Forum

The Forum wishes to be representative of all users of the countryside and landowners and environmentalists but whilst we can have up to 21 members some sectors are not represented. Those of us on the Forum wear many hats and we are all interested in the environment but we do not have anybody directly involved with groups working in that field. We are also short at the moment of people particularly interested in motor sport or cycling. Nor do we currently have members of the ethnic minorities or the less able sector.

The Forum meets four times a year formally so it is not a great demand on your time so why not come along as a visitor and see what we get up to. Not only do we meet formally, but also frequently undertake site visits and surveys which can be enjoyable.

We currently have spaces on the Forum and would welcome applications. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Edwin McWilliam on 0116 305 7086 (or email Edwin.mcwilliam@leics.gov.uk) who will be able to answer any questions and provide an application form.

