

Rural Planning Review  
By email

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RuralPlanningReview@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum would wish to comment on the review in hand. We have no first hand evidence but given the wide range of interests amongst our membership feel we can take a balanced look at the situation.

Tourism provides significant employment in all areas and whilst most overseas visitors wish to see our wonderful buildings and interesting historic cities there is an increasing interest in our wilder places. For example considerable numbers of people from the Netherlands visit our hill country.

Locally here in Leicester, the Richard III interest brings visitors into the city but also encourages people from Leicester City out to the battlefield site(s) and also our Lady Jane Grey interest which draws people to Bradgate Park, a local 'honey pot' where we need to relieve the pressure by the planners facilitating other attractions.

We must not overlook the considerable leisure tourism from our own urban areas to rural areas, and the health and wellbeing benefits of fresh air and exercise. The more this is encouraged the more rural businesses, providing for their needs, can grow and diversify, sustaining local communities. This then leads to employment for local people, helping them to stay in their communities if housing is available. This in turn gives more sustaining local services, such as public transport, churches, schools, pubs and shops/post offices.

Land managers need encouragement and support in maintaining the landscape to draw people into rural areas. They can provide services to support the tourist industry including accommodation tea rooms and farm shops.

We must also ensure that not only is an attractive landscape maintained but that there is adequate access to actually enjoy our countryside.

The planning system can play a major part in this by ensuring our rights of way network is protected and actually enhanced where possible.

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Terry Kirby, Chairman of the Access Forum

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The trade off for grant support and planning permission can sometimes be the provision of a link in a route. It can also help by ensuring affordable housing both to buy and let is available within small communities.

The National Planning Policy Framework does set out in broad terms how planning can be used as a tool to support rural economies. It allows for the use of new and existing buildings but we feel there could be more emphasis on the imaginative use of existing and often semi derelict properties. We need to increase housing availability in villages whilst protecting the Green Belt and Green Wedges but should also ensure separation zones so that communities can remain distinct identities.

We feel agricultural buildings could convert to residential buildings but with some form of covenant that they must be the primary residence of the occupants and at least one occupant should be in full time employment in the vicinity or have retired from full time employment nearby

Small scale wind turbines and solar panels on buildings help the economy and the environment but planners should ensure that larger scale schemes do not disfigure the landscape to the extent that visitors stop contributing to the local economy.

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*The Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LAF) is an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000, and exists to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways and areas of open access.*

*Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities, on access issues in respect of land use planning matters. Forums are tasked with identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new developments.*