

Round up for East Midlands meeting 9th October by the Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF)

During the last year we have offered advice to a number of local authorities and major developers to try to secure the best possible outcomes for all users of rights of way and open spaces. We continue to be represented on various relevant organisations, widening our sphere of influence and invite major organisations, developers, etc., to our meetings to facilitate positive discussions.

Our advice to local government is on their strategic plans and substantial planning applications which could impact on rights of way or afford opportunities to improve the network.

We have also continued to promote and encourage more people to use rights of way and open spaces for their general health and wellbeing, and sustainable travel to the benefit of the environment.

We have an ongoing dialogue with HS2 and also the early stages of one with the potential new Rail/freight interchange by Burbage Common.

We also occasionally invite large organisations and developers to our meetings to see how we can assist them and members of the Planning and Travel Committee do site visits where justified. We comment on substantial planning applications which could impact on rights of way or afford opportunities to improve the network.

Three members while not directly representing the Forum do have ongoing meetings with the bus companies.

We continue to monitor the Network Rail crossings situation and await a public enquiry into one at Barrow upon Soar which we have vigorously opposed.

The Network Opportunities Committee and its Unrecorded Ways Sub Committee work to enhance the network of the public rights of way as opportunities arise and monitors open access land and higher level stewardship schemes. The unrecorded ways project was created to identify unrecorded ways and ensure sufficient historic evidence is available to submit an application for a route to be recognised as a permanent public right of way. We set up the processes and collected the base data and have staged training taster events to encourage volunteer researchers. This was done by the subcommittee during this period of intense activity but has now been returned to Network Opportunities for the ongoing progress. We have a team of volunteers researching specific areas or routes and these people have been recruited from various user groups and organisations. The main players have been co-opted onto a working party who are to meet from time to time.

This group has a budget for research purposes made up of donations from several user groups with a contribution from the County Council. One member of the LLAF acts as the archivist to this project another provides the secretarial requirements and a third is responsible for the funds. Payment from the fund requires the authority of 2 from 5 named members of the LLAF.

Charnwood Park Regional Park

LLAF are represented on the steering group of a landscape partnership project funded to date by the Lottery. This is a major project that will enhance and economically improve access for all. The unique natural and cultural heritage features of Charnwood Forest will be managed and promoted on behalf of the Charnwood Forest Regional Park and one member of the LLAF is on the board of that organisation. The aim is that the Regional Park be recognised as an essential asset of the growing communities in the Derby, Leicester and Nottingham areas now and in the future. Bids are currently being completed.

Funds have been provided to pay for professional support to work up the project and unless something goes wrong in this stage another £3.000.000 should be coming our way from the Heritage Lottery Fund

Forum Recruitment

During the last 12 months we have lost 3 valued members and working with Officers of Leicestershire County Council we are actively looking to recruit new members to complement the Forum.

The Forum seeks 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. Members 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; members of the ethnic minorities or the less able sector.

The Leicestershire Forum meets about five times a year formally so it is not a great demand on members' time although members with the time do work between meetings on the various projects and work of the committees.

John Howells, Chairman LLAF

Oct 1st 2018