

SOUTH WEST LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2006

Welcome to the first newsletter for SW Local Access Forums. The aim of the newsletter is to circulate useful information and to facilitate the exchange of good practice. It's in electronic form to save on publishing costs and to enable people to access links.

STOP PRESS

LAF Action Plan

- *The revised **Guidance** is still being finalised...watch out for it shortly.*
- *Plans for the **LAF members' handbook** are proceeding. The Countryside Agency recognised the magnitude of the project and will be commissioning a specialist company to produce this. It will be published as one of Natural England's first flagship documents early in 2007.*

Congratulations to Plymouth LAF which held its first meeting in March. Chairman is Paul Gregory, a marine and terrestrial ecologist, who previously worked as a wildlife and conservation officer for the SW Lakes Trust. He is an active member of the Port of Plymouth Marine Liaison Committee. Vice Chairman is Ray Fairchild, a keen walker and member of the former (pre-LAF) Plymouth PROW Forum.

Name change but not by deed poll!
Devon Local Access Forum has changed its name to the Devon Countryside Access Forum. Members felt this reflected its role more accurately and would be better understood by the public. Dartmoor has also changed its name to the Dartmoor Access Forum. Other Forums are putting this issue on their agendas in the near future.

Best of Both Worlds – linking outdoor pursuits and nature conservation

A new initiative, the Best of Both Worlds: outdoor pursuits and nature conservation, has been launched by the Countryside Agency, working in partnership with English Nature and the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR). The project is aimed at outdoor activity providers and land managers, with the emphasis on encouraging people to enjoy their pursuits whilst allowing land managers to make decisions to benefit the land they look after. The initiative promotes best practice in planning outdoor pursuits in areas where particular nature conservation sensitivities exist.

Case studies, from a range of activities and habitats, demonstrate how agreement can ensure recreation and conservation are brought together for mutual benefit. This may involve situations where a local club is trying to gain access to a prohibited site, or trying to ensure existing access is not restricted. An increased understanding of a site's importance to others has a lot to do with reaching a successful outcome. For example, a canoe company has got involved in bird surveys and this illustrates just one example where outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists have got together to protect and improve what they both enjoy.

The web provides guidance on designated conservation sites, event planning, codes of practice, types of access, and simple steps to consensus building. In addition, there are extensive links and references. A 'Contact Us' page for those who have tried all reasonable avenues to reach agreement on their outdoor activity aims, but require some further specific advice, has also been facilitated through the web. www.bobw.co.uk

If your LAF has examples of where it has acted as brokers in such a situation the Countryside Agency would like to add these to the website.

			
Do you organise outdoor events? click here for more information	Is someone planning an event on your land? click here for more information	Do you take part in outdoor pursuits...? click here for more information	Do you enjoy getting out into nature? click here for more information



Figures on cycling

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_susttravel/documents/page/dft_susttravel_611854.hcsp gives recently published information on individual local highway authority's performance for cycling provision. Although the figures relate to 2003/4 and there may have been improvements since then, it's worth a look to see how your authority is faring, particularly in relation to Council commitment, the LTP and cycling, and stakeholder engagement. Check out your authority's RoWIP to see whether improvements are planned.



The future's green...

According to the Countryside Agency, the 'Walking the Way to Health Initiative' (WHI) has helped to create over 350 local health walk schemes, trained over 20,000 volunteer walk leaders and it's estimated the project has encouraged over a million people to walk more. Building on this success the new Countryside Agency's **Green Exercise programme** aims to run a nationwide programme to encourage physical activity and improve mental health, especially in hard-to-reach groups and deprived areas. It will provide a menu of accessible outdoor activities, such as kite flying, cycling, bird watching and conservation, which people can build into their daily lives. Find out more at www.whi.org.uk/green Projects throughout the region are currently being submitted in the Green Exercise bid to the Big Lottery Fund's Well-being Programme.

The region already hosts numerous interesting projects including 'Saddlebags and Secateurs', a conservation based exercise scheme in Cornwall, and the 'Wild Roots project' to provide easier off-road access to forests and green spaces in and around Bristol and Gloucestershire.

Higher Level Stewardship and the Single Farm Payment

Defra is just about to produce a series of Technical Advice Notes on Higher Level Stewardship covering permissive access. Aimed at applicants, agents and advisers the notes will cover objectives of the scheme; selection criteria, targeting and consultation; eligibility for access payments under Higher Level Stewardship; the CRoW Act; planning consent, cross-compliance and legal issues; and educational access.

LAFs may be able to use these notes to encourage applications which deliver some of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan objectives.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rds/publications/#tech>

Farmer, Mark Hovarth, has had his case for discrimination referred to the European Court of Justice. He states that failure to maintain rights of way does not lead to reductions in the Single Farm Payment elsewhere in Europe or in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,200-2280067,00.html>

ROWIP Progress

Production of Rights of Way Improvement Plans has continued to progress slowly in the SW Region, with Devon (incorporating Dartmoor and part of Exmoor) and Gloucestershire the only ROWIPs which have been finalised. However, both Somerset and Torbay have now published their drafts and consultation periods have finished, prior to revision and publication of final versions.

The Countryside Agency will continue to help authorities with advice and good practice guidance, (in addition to commenting on draft ROWIPs), to try to ensure that all authorities publish good quality final ROWIPs before the deadline in November 2007. The Countryside Agency would encourage LAFs to continue to take a keen and active interest in the preparation of ROWIPs and to engage fully with the authority as they produce the Plan and the subsequent Statements of Action.





Coastal Access

Barry Gardiner, Minister for Biodiversity, Landscape and Rural Affairs, has made a written Ministerial Statement saying that he expects the Defra public consultation paper on coastal access to be issued in early 2007. The Minister has decided to ask the new Natural England Board to take forward the work and make recommendations to Defra by the end of the year.

CONSULTATIONS – Outdoors for All?

The Countryside Agency is now consulting on 'Outdoors for All?', the draft Diversity Action Plan. The consultation began on 23 May and ends on 30 September. Feedback on the draft strategy is welcomed, and the CA would be especially pleased to receive comments from Local Access Forums. The draft Diversity Action Plan can be accessed from the Defra website <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/outdoorsdiversity/> or ordered by phoning DEFRA publications on 08459 556000, quoting reference PB 11907). The Plan follows an investigation by the CA into what can be done to support participation in outdoor recreation by disabled people, black and minority ethnic people, people who live in inner city areas and young people. The overall programme of work is called the 'Diversity Review', which was a commitment made by DEFRA in the Rural White Paper 2000 and confirmed and clarified in the 2004 Rural Strategy.

Research shows that all the groups questioned clearly expressed a desire to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation. However, it also indicated that a lack of information, and concern about not being made welcome, will undermine people's confidence to access outdoor recreation. Those without a car also found transport a major barrier. Research also showed that recreation providers lack confidence in engaging with diverse groups.

The Action Plan outlines objectives, outcomes and targets to achieve a sustained and measurable increase, by 2016, amongst under-represented groups in both awareness of what the natural environment has to offer, (and where to go to enjoy it), and in actual numbers of people enjoying outdoor recreation.



And from the House of Lords (28 June 2006) Column WA149

Baroness Byford asked Her Majesty's Government: *In the light of the National Audit Office report on The Right of Access to Open Countryside, when the results of the Countryside Agency's in-depth survey research on the uptake of access rights will be made available; and whether there are any plans to continue that research to cover the 2006 summer holiday period. [HL6475]*

Lord Rooker: *The Countryside Agency's four-year monitoring programme commenced in 2004–05. The pilot year has been completed with 2005–06 being the first full monitoring year. Findings from the England Day Visitor Survey and the Omnibus Tracking Survey will be made available later this year and we expect the results of the first years of monitoring to be made available towards the end of 2007. The monitoring programme will include the 2006 summer holiday period.*

The National Audit Office Report is available at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/05-06/05061046.pdf

Executive summary on http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/05-06/05061046es.htm

Are any authorities carrying out their own research into use of access land?

Reflections from Oliver Chamberlain, Chairman of Dorset LAF since its inception in May 2002. Oliver is a chartered surveyor and land agent.

As Chairman of the Dorset Local Access Forum (LAF) I continually wonder if the LAF has a serious part to play or are we just a talking shop, a sop to the fashion of consultation, focus groups and the like.

The Dorset LAF is not unique but it has developed a distinctive, perhaps slightly less formal style of working. The strength of the LAF lies in the wealth of knowledge the individual members bring to the LAF. Of course each member comes to the table with their own special interest but one quickly finds no member has just a single interest and there is considerable overlap within the different groups. As a consequence the Dorset LAF has a strong co-operative team spirit. This makes the Chairman's task much easier! Topics are well aired and debated; the end result is usually consensus. This united front lends weight to the decisions made and the notice given to them by the appropriate authority or body.

With the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) provisions for open access land well established in the County much of the emphasis of the Dorset LAF's work is on the Rights of Way Improvement Programme (ROWIP), its delivery and the management of expectation generated. We are concerned, as ever, over the provision of adequate funding to implement the ROWIP and at the same time maintaining the extensive PROW network in the County.

We also see a continuing need for the education of the providers of open access and public rights of way (PROWs) and the users of their rights, responsibilities and the need to reconcile their differing interests. We believe this is an important aspect of our work and are looking at ways in which we can develop our influence.

The members of the Dorset LAF lead busy lives and there is a limit to how often as Chairman I can expect them to gather to together. We try and achieve our remit by meeting as a whole Forum 3 times a year and like other LAFs we have formed sub groups to give detailed consideration to particular topics. In our case we have formed two permanent sub groups to consider the ROWIP and Education and we raise other sub groups as and when the need arises. These sub groups meet as often as they consider necessary but usually at least once a quarter. Much work is also conducted via email.

Equally important to the LAF's work is the relationship with the Appointing Authorities. Fortunately in Dorset this is excellent and we receive terrific support from the Officers. Likewise, we have developed good relationships with the neighbouring LAFs as of course there is much common ground between us.

Well, is the Dorset LAF just a talking shop or can we make a difference?

We do have an important role and I believe we deliver, but then I would say that wouldn't I. What have we achieved; well we like to think our approach has resulted in:-

- *increased support to the Dorset County Rights of Way team,*
- *the appointment of a co-ordinator for the volunteer groups in the County,*
- *an increase in the number of wardens on the urban fringe,*
- *a review to speed up the process and reduce the cost for considering uncontested PROW diversions,*
- *the promotion of the proposed Poole Harbour trail,*

to name but a few.

There will be intensifying demands made on our Countryside and the need for a dedicated group of volunteers to represent the diverse needs of all interests and to advise the Appointing Authorities and Natural England will be increasingly important.

The LAF can and does make a difference.

Oliver Chamberlain, Chairman Dorset Local Access Forum
OJH Chamberlain QVRM TD FRICS

Natural England

Major changes are being made to the way in which our natural environment will be safeguarded, managed, funded and enjoyed in the future.

From October a new independent body, Natural England, is being established with responsibility to conserve and enhance the value and beauty of England's natural environment and to promote access, recreation and public well-being for the benefit of today's and future generations. It will unite the landscape, access and recreation work of the Countryside Agency, the wildlife and geological expertise of English Nature and the environmental land management remit of Defra's Rural Development Service to provide a coordinated and stronger, single voice for the environment - locally, regionally and nationally.

The new Chief Executive, Dr Helen Phillips, made this comment on her appointment *"I believe the time is right to put land managers centre stage to improve biodiversity, landscape, access, recreation and sustainable food and farming. I intend that Natural England will be a trenchant champion for the environment, putting people at the heart of our decision making."*

In preparation for Natural England, a management board has now been appointed, along with senior staff. A key document has been published - 'Natural England - Strategic Direction 2006-2009'. One of the four strategic outcomes for NE will be: *More people enjoying, understanding and acting to improve the natural environment, more often.* This outcome identifies three objectives.

- *increase the number, diversity and frequency of people enjoying the natural environment;*
- *increase everyone's understanding of and ability to take action for the natural environment;*
- *improve places for people to enjoy the natural environment.*

A number of more specific targets have also been identified, several of which will be relevant to the LAFs' advisory role. More details will follow.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGION

Following on from a Devon/Cornwall sub-regional meeting, Somerset hosted a meeting for Chairs and Vice Chairs from neighbouring LAFs in April. The intention of these meetings are to pool expertise and information as well as passing examples of successful initiatives and practice between a smaller group than the SW regional group. To this end one of the LAF members at that meeting has set up a web site that is just for those in the sub regional group and the member in charge of that puts on relevant papers/information as individuals from the LAFs send them to him. It's just a communication line between neighbours - the LAF "Good Neighbour Group." *Note: The East Midlands is piloting a web information site and discussion forum and I'm currently looking at the contents and progress of this. Ed.*

SW LAF activities

I hope to arrange a number of events for SW LAFs during 2006/2007 and further details will follow. However, it would be useful to have your LAF feedback on the type of event and topics you would find helpful. Please contact me with your ideas hilary.winter@devon.gov.uk
Tel: 01837 810921. (Lucombe House, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QW)

I would also value comments on this newsletter and particularly examples of good practice from your LAF or authority area which can be included in the next edition. **Any suggestions for a name?**

