

Event supported by



SOUTH WEST REGION LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS **Conference held on 20 October 2009, Taunton**

EVENT NOTES

Attendance

The event was attended by 44 people, including speakers and workshop facilitators. Twenty-seven attendees were LAF members, representing eleven out of the twelve LAFs in the region. LAF secretaries/local authority officers from eight LAFs were represented.

Speakers and workshop presenters

Keynote speaker:

Terry Robinson, Head of People and Access Policy, Natural England
Natural England's Access and Recreation Policy and the role of LAFs

Workshops:

Amanda Earnshaw, Senior Specialist, Stakeholder Liaison, Access Projects Support Group, Natural England

Involving LAFs and local people in the coastal implementation process

Colin Jones, SW Advocacy & Partnerships Team

Over to You – identifying key issues for LAFs in the region

Adrian Roper, Regional Director, Sustrans

Implementation of regional policy and working more effectively with LAFs

Jane Yates, People Team – Policy and Access

Local Transport Plan – the role of RoWIPs and the LAF

Electronic copies of some of the workshop notes were subsequently made available to LAFs in the region.

Paul Heal, Chairman of Somerset LAF and a SW member on the England Access Forum, welcomed conference participants.

Terry Robinson, Head of People and Access Policy, Natural England
Natural England's Access and Recreation Policy and the role of LAFs

Terry Robinson gave an interesting presentation, illustrated with a few pictorial images.

He drew attention to some facts surrounding the decline in outdoor activity, particularly for children.

- Over the past 20 years there has been a 90% decrease in the "home range" of a typical 8 yr old - area that a child can travel around on their own
- The number of children that visit a patch of nature up to twice a week has halved in a generation
- A third of 8 to 10 yr-olds never play outside without adult supervision.
- 80% of 7 to 8 yr-olds walked unaccompanied to school in 1990, now 5%.

He cited health problems as a key reason for promoting access and recreation.

- 120,000 people die each year from coronary heart disease, 60,000 from strokes, 50,000 from cardiovascular disease and 80,000 from respiratory diseases.
- Diabetes costs the NHS £5.2billion annually, obesity £8.5b and mental health £23b.
- A 10% increase in green space delivers a health profile equivalent to a drop in age of 5 years.
- 80% of people who take part in health walks do so because of the countryside.
- Access to green space alleviates stress in children, reduces Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and raises self-esteem.
- Areas with green vegetation have seen a 52% drop in criminal activity.

Access to the countryside was traditionally seen as a process of managing a problem. Fourth Wave published by the Civic Trust saw leisure as a problem. In 1977 Natural England reported 10m people got out and about in the countryside. In 1996 the House of Commons Environment Committee debunked the conflict. The Foot and Mouth crisis in 2001 demonstrated the importance of the countryside – the South West Coast Path brings in £300m a year and supports 7500 jobs.

Some people feel alienated from the countryside and see it as white and middle-aged. Only 7% of the voting population would see countryside issues as important to the way they vote.

The role of Natural England is to take a fresh approach and look for linkages, reflecting its integrated agency. Three of NE's five objectives link to access – understanding and enjoyment; encouraging access and recreation and contributing to social and economic well-being. NE is a powerful and

independent body which aims to maintain the delicate balance in the countryside and help people to gain benefit.

Over the past **three** years some of NE achievements have been:-

- 88.4% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in a recovering or favourable condition
- 50,000 priority wildlife sites now in protection
- A fourfold expansion in Walking for Health participation, to cover 32,000 participants, which could save the Health Service £80m a year
- An increase in volunteers of 24%
- 1m school children had an outdoor experience
- 30,000km of new hedgerow
- 800 farms offering educational visits
- 11% reduction per annum in greenhouse gases through agri-environment schemes

Access provides the widest range of opportunities for all to engage in, value and enjoy the natural environment.

1. Places which people can enjoy close to where they live; the least restrictive approach and multi-functional
2. Coastal access; low carbon use, a right for walkers but with a multi-functional aspiration
3. Access through public rights of way, open access and agri-environment schemes should increase positive sustainable connections and overcome barriers. LAFs have a role in getting deals to happen.
4. Promotion of high quality trails and routes; better linkages and a low carbon approach. Aim is to raise standards and maximise the positive economic impact. Projects along the Thames and the Sustrans coast to coast in Cumbria have been shown to stimulate regeneration.

LAFs are in a prime position to act as visionaries to things that can happen; deal fixers to make sustainability happen on the ground and achieve solutions where everyone wins.

Questions (chaired by Paul Heal, Chairman of Somerset LAF and EAF member)

Q. *Graham Ronan, Cornwall CAF, asked about the relationship between public rights of way and local authorities.*

A. *LAFs need to demonstrate figures for social cohesion, health and economic regeneration e.g. The National Trust's 'Value of the Environment' Report. LAFs need to show how investment in the environment is an investment and select some places to publicise.*

Q. *Bob Harvey, Devon CAF, expressed concern about the sale of public land and the low level of such land compared with Europe.*

A. *The countryside can accommodate more people and it does not necessarily have to be land in public ownership. It is possible to get deals with people working together. A society wide movement is needed to improve access.*

Q. *Mike Amos, North Somerset LAF, mentioned the distancing of children from the countryside through closure of village schools and decline in number of farms. CRB checks and National Curriculum targets restricted countryside visits. He said NE had a role in influencing education departments.*

A. *Community as a whole has to live with CRB checks. The National Curriculum was an issue. NE had written to the Secretary of State as the primary curriculum does not mention the environment. The Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom seeded a Council that NE is involved with. Getting children outdoors is starting to deliver benefits.*

Q. *Helen Jenny, Dartmoor Access Forum, commented that in addition to influencing the curriculum teachers lacked experience of the countryside. Leaders with experience were needed to inspire children.*

A. *Yes, NE would agree with this.*

Q. *Terry Faull, Devon CAF, asked what could be done to reverse the reduction in people seeing the countryside as a vote issue.*

A. *People need step by step encouragement rather than criticism from the environmental movement.*

Comment. *Helen Barnett, NE. The feedback from those going to farms is excellent. NE has the potential to join up access using agri-environment schemes, safe routes to schools and permissive access. She encouraged LAFs to get in touch where they saw possibilities.*

Terry Robinson concluded by saying that LAFs have an exciting job to do. They are equipped with the local knowledge to be authoritative and have a more positive role than originally envisaged.

WORKSHOPS

Participants had the opportunity to join two workshops, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. In the feedback session Ray Newbigin, Chairman of JLAF and SW member on the England Access Forum, sought key points from each of the workshops.

WORKSHOP 1 – Coastal Access

Amanda Earnshaw, Senior Specialist, Stakeholder Liaison, Access Projects Support Group, Natural England
Involving LAFs and local people in the coastal implementation process

Amanda outlined the process for implementing coastal access and the different stages. In a statutory capacity LAFs were involved in stages 4-7:

- Stage 4 – consultation on draft proposals
- Stage 5 – Final Report
- Stage 6 – Representations
- Stage 7 – Submission to the Secretary of State

In a non-statutory capacity LAFs could also get involved in preparing the way (stage 0), collection and analysis of relevant information (stage 1) and coastal access in practice (stages 8-10).

Consultation on Natural England's scheme would be web-based and involve a series of regional workshops, to which LAF representatives would be invited. Work in Weymouth Bay would be started to link with the 2012 Olympics.

Discussion was wide-ranging and covered areas such as spreading room, long term maintenance, legislation covering dogs, restrictions, compensation, the process for re-assessment, bulls, need for circular routes and the consultation process.

Key points from Workshop 1

- There needs to be understanding of the whole process
- Practical consideration of coastal access proposals within the planning validation process needs to be made
- What happens if landowners are difficult?
- The statutory contribution of the LAF needs to be explained
- What happens about long term maintenance?
- Consideration needs to be given to circular and wider routes.

The workshop facilitator, Amanda Earnshaw, said the finer detail of the scheme needs to be sorted out and communicated.

WORKSHOP 2

Jane Yates, People Team – Policy and Access

Local Transport Plan – the role of RoWIPs and the LAF

Jane outlined the importance of linking RoWIPs to the new Local Transport Plan3 to optimise the part rights of way play in the wider transport system and the contribution that can be made to national transport goals namely:

- Support economic growth
- Reduce carbon emissions
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Contribute to better safety, security and health
- Improve quality of life and healthy natural environment

LAFs are statutory consultees in the LTP process. Jane encouraged LAFs to be active in the LTP process through contact with key officers and encouragement of working between LTP and RoWIP staff. LAFs also have a role in influencing Local Area Agreements.

LTP3 has to be completed by 2011. LAFs could get involved in any steering group for LTP/RoWIP integration. Local Area Agreements are seen as the vehicle for supporting transport improvements and LAFs were encouraged to work closely with LAA priorities and the Local Strategic Partnership. These are new areas for many LAFs and LAFs were encouraged to seek out relevant officers in their authorities to gain better understanding of the processes and potential for LAF involvement.

Key points from Workshop 2

- The LTP is a key hook for cash in Councils. How can LAFs make the best of this?
- LAFs must use transport goals and Local Area Agreement indicators and ensure projects match these
- LAFs should identify and get to know people – Government Office SW, LTP Senior Officers and Council Executive Members.
- LAFs have a real opportunity to influence rights of way

The workshop facilitator, Jane Yates, advised LAFs to get involved at a strategic level and at an early stage. This should pay dividends.

WORKSHOP 3 – Over to You

Colin Jones, SW Advocacy & Partnerships Team

Over to You – identifying key issues for LAFs in the region

Colin led a discussion on issues that members wished to share. These ranged from access type issues, such as undergrazing of access land and road crossings, to administrative issues affecting LAFs such as dealing with consultations. Participants welcomed the opportunity to discuss matters which they were particularly concerned about.

Key points from Workshop 3

- Secretarial support for LAFs is insufficient
- Funding is often insufficient
- The quantity of consultations poses a problem. The LAFs would like a better format, an executive summary and advance warning of forthcoming consultations. LAFs would welcome feedback – usually non-existent.
- Policy issues of more than local significance include:
 - Undergrazing – land management and grant systems
 - Major road crossings and influencing the Department of TransportBoth these could be addressed by the England Access Forum

WORKSHOP 4 – Sustrans

Adrian Roper, Regional Director, Sustrans

Implementation of regional policy and working more effectively with LAFs

The Sustrans vision is “a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment.” Sustrans aims to find practical and imaginative solutions to the transport challenges. ¼ of all car trips are under 2 miles (NTS 1999/2001, DoT 2002) and 34% are between 2 and 5 miles.

In 2008 the National Cycle Network covered 12,000 miles – some permissive, some on long lease, some on bridleways and some in Sustrans ownership. In addition there are motivational programmes such as work with schools, often in association with local authorities. Connect 2 received lottery money for eight schemes in the SW.

Area Managers are part-funded by local authorities. Volunteer rangers are used extensively. Some have other partners, such as in Cornwall the Primary Care Trust. Sustrans sometimes match funds Local Transport Plan and Section 106 money.

The Stop Line from Weston Super Mare to Seaton is planned as an off and on-road route, 70 miles in total.

Discussions in this workshop were again wide-ranging and focussed primarily on:

- Horses - multi-use; recognition of the number of horses in the SW and their contribution to the economy; landowners reaction to horse use; implications for maintenance and surfacing, conflict with other users and perceptions of multi-use
- Design, materials and maintenance – rural versus urban schemes; long term maintenance and budget/commitment of councils. Reference was made to Sustrans Greenway Guide and Cycling Infrastructure Guide
- Consultation processes and involvement of LAFs at an early stage.

Key Points from Workshop 4

- Sustrans working with partners who may drive forward projects
- Sealed surfaces – desirable or otherwise
- Communications with LAF – problem with early discussions without compromising confidentiality
- Integration
- Future maintenance, particularly for small authorities
- Equestrian fraternity – multi-use and help with safety issues

The workshop facilitator, Adrian Roper, said that LAFs should be consulted more at an early stage. Security of tenure and maintenance for the future are critical issues. Sustrans work should be more aligned with RoWIPs and LTP.