

## **Meeting of the Mid Lincolnshire Local Access Forum on 26 April 2016**

### **Report on Natural England Local Access Forum Conference in Leeds on 1 March 2016**

#### **Report by Christopher Padley, Chair of the Mid Lincolnshire Local Access Forum**

I attended the above conference as Chair of the MLAF. I found the programme weighted towards presentations rather than workshops and discussions, compared with previous conferences, which I find a pity and I actually got more out of the day from the informal discussions over tea breaks etc, than from the talks.

The main talks I attended were, firstly, a presentation from a LAF in the north east on alternative funding. This was based on their experience in rather special circumstances, where there had been proposals for major new housing development on green field sites, and the developers had been keen to cover all the bases, so to speak, in terms of public benefit and good planning design. The LAF had been instrumental in winning funding from them for studies into the local path network, its shortcomings, opportunities and most of all the future needs should the development take place. An important part of this process had been one of gaining some small funding to start with which enabled the work towards drawing down larger funding to be carried out. Unfortunately, I think a lot of delegates were left feeling that the opportunities on which this example had been based are rare.

The other session was by the Disabled Ramblers Association, an organization I had not previously heard of. Their activity appears to be based entirely on mobility scooters, particularly the users of those robust type designed to go over rough ground. There was clearly an enormous benefit for this type of user from the ability to get out into the deep countryside, and even up mountains, together with the important social aspect of this activity. However, at the same time, I was left with unease at two aspects of this. One was the lack of exercise involved; the other was that the group is particularly adventurous and willing to travel using adapted vehicles to carry their scooters. I feel the work of LAFs should be focused on providing everyone with local access to their local countryside, etc, and towards the broad range of the disabled. This is not a criticism of the DRA, but a reminder that disability comes in many forms and degrees. It does pose in my mind the much broader question of how can we help people with disability to get exercise, not just access?

In the workshops I was particularly interested to hear more of the legal case known as "Andrews 2", by which the Court of Appeal has clarified the interpretation of enclosure awards in a very helpful way for those seeking to

make DMMO claims. The judgment is actually helpful over the interpretation of early nineteenth and eighteenth century local acts in general.

I was also interested to hear of successful use of the land registration system by some communities to protect for the public user some "white roads" awarded as private roads without the need to prove that they are public rights of way. Parishes have, in some cases, proved ownership of these roads and registered this ownership. As owners they are then able to open them to the public.

Overall, it was an interesting and useful day but, as often happens, in different ways to the ones I would have expected from the published programme.

Chris Padley

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