

Mid Lincolnshire Local Access Forum – 18 July 2017

Natural England LAF Conference at Birmingham 21 June 2017

Report by Chris Padley, Chairman of the Mid-Lincs Local Access Forum (LAF)

I attended this conference on behalf of the Mid Lincs LAF. Lincolnshire County Council's Environmental Services Team Leader (Countryside), Chris Miller, also attended on behalf of the Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPROW), to assist in the presentation of the workshop on Network Rail and level crossings.

I attended the workshop on railway crossings and that on multi-user routes. The main presentations included an update on access issues from Natural England, a talk on Health and the Natural Environment, a talk from Defra on the deregulation act, and a talk on future role of RoWIPs and their preparation.

We all had some difficulty with the venue because of poor acoustics and a very stuffy atmosphere. Talking to other delegates I found a fairly high level of dissatisfaction, partly because of these problems with the venue, but also because the speakers from Natural England and Defra seem out of touch with life at the sharp end of a LAF. They spend too much time telling us basic, even obvious, things we already know, or suggesting we do things which are quite beyond our resources and sometimes even remit. This is reflected in the organization of all the recent conferences, which are essentially a series of talks by "them" to us, with a few questions thrown in at the end. Much more time needs to be spent by "them" listening to us, and for the delegates to be able to share problems and ideas in a constructive way. I think some of the Defra and NE officers would have something to learn.

I am pleased to be able to say that the most constructive part of the day which I attended was the IPROW workshop on level crossings and Network Rail. This is an area in which sharing knowledge between different areas of the country, involving both LAFs and the authorities is both useful and important. I would like to congratulate Chris Miller on his role in organizing this.

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