

Agenda Item 5c

**East Midlands LAF Chairs Meeting
1st October 2013 at Leicestershire County Hall
Notes of the meeting**

Attendees:

Diane Moore, Nottingham City LAF
Richard Entwistle representing Peak District LAF
Chris Padley, Mid Lincolnshire LAF
Roy Denney, Leicestershire LAF – Chair for the meeting
Mary Mills, Nottinghamshire LAF
John Law, representing South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF and Northamptonshire LAF
David Lyne, Leicester City LAF
Paul Standley, representing Leicester City LAF
Vicky Allen a member of Leicestershire LAF
Terry Kirby, a member of Leicestershire LAF
Angela Smith, Natural England (angela.smith@naturalengland.org.uk)
Mandy Sims, East Midlands LAF Co-ordinator

Apologies:

Stuart Roberts, Northamptonshire LAF
Joan Dryburgh / John Disney, Derby and Derbyshire LAF
Ray Wootten, South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF

Thanks to hosts, Leicestershire LAF, and in particular, Andrew Poole and Ed McWilliam of Leicestershire County Council

1. Welcome and introductions

Roy opened the meeting with an appreciation of the late Chris Precey of Leicester City LAF, who was a founder member of that LAF and who attended many previous regional meetings. All expressed their appreciation of Chris.

Roy welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introductions were made.

2. Minutes and matters arising

Annual Review – confirmed that this is sufficient for LAFs to complete. Anything else is up to the individual LAF. The Reviews get put on Huddle, Mandy does a regional summary, then NE do a full report to DEFRA – hopefully, giving LAFs a higher profile.

Many noted that some boxes were tricky to complete. In particular, the tick box section is a bit ambiguous. Can one item end up providing ticks in more than one box? Is it OK to double count?

Action: Angela to pass this message on to Rob Leek asking for a steer on future forms

Action: All Chairs - If not yet sent 2012/13 Annual Review to Mandy, please do it asap.

Changing a LAF's name

Received clarifying email from Rob Leek on this. Essentially, a LAF can change its name if it is agreed by the members and minuted accordingly – check LAF guidance for detail.

HS2 in our region

Phil sent out how LAFs can feedback comments.

Roy commented that HS2 has done the consultation but not invited LAFs. It would be good timing to consult as could help public opinion. Terry commented that there are local events for the public about HS2

Action: John Law to send the contact person for HS2's details to Mandy to send to all Chairs - DONE

Action: Angela to send info from Warwickshire and Worcestershire LAFs meeting with HS2 - DONE

Planning Authorities and the way they consult over planning applications that affect PROWs

Chris clarified that the issue was about how planners consult with others (e.g. user groups), and how the LAF might advise them. He acknowledged that 'consultation' happens but it is a tick box exercise.

Chris and Mid Lincs LAF have a new strategy, which is to find a planning authority who will listen to them, and then to influence others by using this a model of how it could work.

Vicky pointed out that the question is really about how a ROW might be affected, not just that it might be moved.

Need now to look at the bigger picture of the network, rather than looking at each case.

David noted that in Leicester City most ROWs affected are Council owned land – no proper attention paid to possible cycle ways and bridleways at, say, a junction.

Diane brought up the Statement of Community Involvement and Design and Access Statement wondering whether LAFs could use these as a tool. Unsure whether all councils have them.

Report on Health

Was actioned by Angela after last meeting – i.e. emailed to LAFs via Mandy

Action: Mandy to resend this email. - DONE

When is Access Land next reviewed?

Phil actioned after last meeting and then sent out to LAFs

Action: Mandy to resend this email

3. Update from Natural England

National Conference

Angela thanked East Mids Chairs for sending letter to NE about concern for Conference loss. She announced that a Conference will go ahead, but in two venues, one for north and one for south, to make for cheaper travel expense and no overnight accommodation. Conference dates are either 6th February or 4th March in the north, venue to be advised. The Bristol conference is 4th February. Local authorities would have to pay a member's travel expenses, and attendees would have to bring own lunch.

Terry mentioned ensuring start and finish times to allow for public transport arrangements.

Diane remarked that some workshops were brilliant at last Conference, some less so. Wondered whether guidance could be given to workshop leaders before the event. The best ones were interactive, where you learned something. Roy noted that a presentation is not always wanted, whilst networking is, though indicated that a presentation about up to date changes in ROW would be good.

Mary enquired about numbers and Angela said that it depends on the capacity of the venues.

Action: Angela to feed back comments about timing and content (above) - DONE

Action: All to give further suggestions about the content of the Conference.

LAF Newsletter – No 2

Coming out soon.

P4C

Angela announced that this was fully committed and over £2million.

Chris pointed out that any report should give the ups and downs of the initiative.

Vicky welcomed it being a rural scheme.

John would like any future scheme to have pots of money split into specific areas.

Action: Angela to provide the statistics from P4C

There was some debate over whether or not local authorities could have applied for P4C, with many believing that the message had been that they could not. Angela confirmed that I.a.s could have applied.

Action: Angela to investigate the possible cause of the confusion and misinformation and to email the LAFs - Done

4. Looking for easy wins on local authorities' farm estates.

John gave info about Leicestershire LAF in this respect – they have a sub-group looking at this. The sub-group is investigating whether the parcels of farmland where tenancies are due to end could provide new PROW. Any changes would be reflected in the new tenancy agreements. They have made 6 recommendations, of which 2 are being actively looked at by the County Council.

South Lincs. and Rutland – Have looked at 29 parcels of land with tenancies ending, and there maybe is something to be gained in one or two areas. The sub-group will make recommendations to CC later this year. Noted that population growing and land getting smaller, so looking for gaps in ROWs and urban areas that would benefit.

Chris – by coincidence, Mid Lincs LAF is doing something similar – the county has an estate of small farms and they are beginning to be looked at.

Action: John to circulate his presentation on this. - DONE (Mandy to put on Huddle?)

Diane – applauds this work and noted that it is important to understand the legal process of this and keep track of it, noting that in Nottingham, when dealing with the 2026 Lost Ways, it can get very complicated and this is a good opportunity to understand the process.

Roy – has written a report on this

Action: Roy to send this report to Mandy to circulate to others. - DONE

5. Richard Beynon's letter to LAFs

Diane interested to understand the relationships of Local Economic Partnerships, Local Nature Partnerships and Health and Well-being Boards.

Angela commented that LEPs have been around for 12 months (about) and are responsible for large budgets. They have sub-groups. Some LAFs have contacted LNPs letting them know what they do.

Terry pointed out that he is on the Transport sub-group of his LEP

Leicestershire LAF has someone coming from the Health and Well-being board to talk to them.

Mandy passed on message from Martin Shaw (NE) to the effect that LAFs may be in a better position to influence and work with LNPs who in turn may be able to influence LEPs. Huddle shows a map with the boundaries of each on it.

6. How local government cuts are impacting on LAF work

Following informal discussions during our last meeting this was on the agenda for feedback from other LAFs as to whether they were still receiving support and whether changes in personnel in DEFRA and NE are affecting them.

Leicestershire – Excellent service, minutes taken, admin done, usually 2 officers present.

S Lincs. and Rutland – 2 officers and an admin person present at the meetings, providing a good service to the LAF

Northants. – not so good as no officers attend with knowledge of ROWs. An officer provides administrative support taking minutes, sending them out and booking rooms. This LAF does not have the links with the CC that most have. The LAF feels very remote.

Mid Lincs. – Professional clerk takes minutes – nothing changed so far. However, there is talk about reorganising LAFs to have just one for the county

Leicester City – No definitive map (LAF did suggest the opening of Glenfield Tunnel and whilst the CC did not pay up front for the investigations, they did eventually pay for it.)

Nottingham City – ROW officer very supportive. Organises sub-group. He is however a one-man band who needs support. The Officer now also takes the minutes as admin person gone so cracks are beginning to show.

Nottinghamshire – One very overworked officer provides support. One ROW officer has been replaced (rather than a vacancy left) but with agency staff.

7. How to tackle recruitment of LAF members

Andrew Poole, officer for Leicestershire LAF entered for this. Described process undergone by this LAF. Made an application pack with role description, person specification and how to apply. Included an application form. Council put out press release to local papers and radio, and also local community magazines. Website piece. Sent pack with covering email to many user groups that might have indirect interest in ROWs. Went on East Mids job portal.

Had about 30 enquiries and 16-20 applicants, for 6-8 positions. Used proper scoring process. Did not target specific roles but kept it open, though did target black and minority ethnic groups with the pack.

Other LAFs reported on their numbers:

Peak District – good cross-section

Leicester City – membership down to 12 (suggests getting interested people to a meeting first)

Nottinghamshire – little low on numbers, though recently recruited a farmer

Mid Lincs. – Local authority does recruitment for us

South Lincs. and Rutland – Rutland well represented

Edwin McWilliam commented that the filling in of the application forms was the key to interesting lots of people. He is concerned that LAFs are not fully representative of society and stated that Leicestershire did not have any young rep or any member of an ethnic minority although their Chair was cultivating members of a largely Hindu walking group.

8. Huddle

Mandy gave a short training session, focussing on the Files, Whiteboards and Discussions tabs. Many commented that when trying to open a file, their computer did not allow it.

Action: Mandy to ask Chris Battersby for advice on this.- DONE

9. LAF Round ups

South Lincs and Rutland – Have a disability sub-group (with mid-Lincs) working with disabled groups and sports partnership to provide factual data for people about the accessibility of routes. Showed website, a very attractive pack with 6 detailed plans (showing gradients, surfacing, obstructions etc), with new routes being planned. Some funding from Public Health budget.

(Roy noted that Ramblers are doing something similar on website which users can add to.)

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) – Preparing letters ready to be sent out to parishes, for sites where grants for permissive access ends next year. The letters are aimed at encouraging parishes to talk to farmers and land owners to request continuance of permissive access. This process has had success in retaining some permissive paths. The LAF has also sent a report to Natural England relating to Higher Level Stewardship and permissive access. Although payment for access is ending, other grants relating to HLS are continuing. A prerequisite to all existing and new HLS schemes is the completion of the Farm Environmental Plan (FEP). The FEP asks the applicant whether they will be providing permissive access. Currently Natural England does nothing with this data. The report recommends that the LAFs are informed of these permissive access sites and sites judged to be of value be placed on the NE web site currently displaying Countryside Stewardship and HLS access sites.

Awaiting CAP recommendations relating to grants for permissive access but it doesn't look as though further funding will be available.

Northamptonshire – HLS - Annual letters being prepared to go out to parishes again to encourage farmers to continue with permissive access. HS2 – cause of concern for the safety of PROW users. Concerns that PROWs are being diverted to grass verges and roads in some cases, to rejoin the PROW the other side of the track corridor. This lack of concern for PROW users may lead to accidents.

Action: John to send Diane the link to the map about this.- DONE

Chris commented that a campaign was needed from LAFs nationally to make ROWs be replaced. Note: Northants LAF has raised an issue with the County Council relating to the expense claim process and have been waiting a response for some time. The current members of the LAF are not aware of expenses ever been paid by the County Council. The Authority has never informed the members that it is stated in the DEFRA documents that justifiable expenses are allowed to be claimed by LAF members. Comment from the floor that this is possibly a breach of agreement.

Peak District – Been ignored by the NP Authority over a few issues. Concern that in trying to get rid of some of its properties, perhaps some access compromised. Been a big campaign headed by BMC, and the North Lees Estate will now stay intact.

Mid-Lincolnshire – Lincs has set up a coastal countryside path. LAF is concerned because the approach to it does not take into account the ROW network. Now have two LAF members on the body that deals with this to push to have this looked at.

Leicester City – Achieved a lot of detail. Lots of projects being implemented by the Council, new schemes etc., that involve ROW. For example, Dunnesthorpe Mill has been bought by the Council and is being opened to the public with lots of ROW implications.

Nottingham City – A highlight was inviting a Crime Commissioner to the LAF for a Q & A session (Notts. LAF came too) – discussion about Gating Orders and Anti-Social Behaviour. Other points of interest include: Gating Order for Holland Street was withdrawn but popped up again; a 3 day session of public enquiry on Park Estate which has been open for access but some want it closed to pedestrians; visited Nottingham Archives (helping towards 2026 Lost Ways); guided walks are still underway.

Nottinghamshire – Doing some recruitment; booking meetings further ahead seems to be working; producing Annual Review this week; meeting with CC Rights of Way Committee about them overriding ROW officers (looking to improve this relationship); ticking over with Gating Orders and diversions.

Leicestershire – Gearing up to look into the several hundred routes that will be affected by HS2; HLS letters still being sent out; trying to re-walk and check the LCC walks; awaiting for outcome of lottery bid (will affect how they deal with Lost & Unrecorded Ways) and offering to act as post box to other organisations researching these issues; problems with Network Rail speeding up mainlines and causing potential ROW diversion and closures.

AOB

Query about the letter from NE to S94 bodies. Mandy confirmed that NE would like LAFs to send it to named people in their local authorities etc

Action: Mandy to resend this email to all- DONE

Issue about safety of people when cows and bulls in fields

Roy raised this issue in light of recent events in the news. The rules from DEFRA clarify what farmers can and cannot do, and the NFU provides a guide to members. How can authorities promote this?

There are 8 dairy breeds itemised in the rules, but Vicky notes that it is hard to find photos of this for clarity on a website.

Perhaps farmers' ignorance on the subject is due to being snowed under with paperwork. How else can they be educated on this? The legislation is quite old, too.

Andrew noted that local authorities are unlikely to inform farmers as it is not in their remit and cuts make it hard to do more than that.

Diane commented that the value of, say, a bull, may be a lever to persuade farmers to follow the rules.

Action: Mandy to inform NE that LAFs suggest to DEFRA that their guidance needs updating (including the list of breeds)

Meeting closed at 3.00 p.m.

Date of next meeting:

TBA – March/April 2014

Venue: Possibly hosted by Leicester City – David to discuss this with Paul.

Action: Mandy to liaise with David and then to inform all.

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