

Mid Lincolnshire and South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local (Countryside) Access Forums Joint Annual Report 2011/ 12



Chairmen's Introduction

Mid Lincolnshire Local Access Forum

This year's report follows a new *pr-forma* for LAF reports set by the government. This has imposed a brevity, and concentration on basic facts, which I for one welcome, for in local government there is always a risk of authorities becoming carried away with their own rhetoric. In a report, sometimes less is more.

The government has, in fact, been taking a great interest in LAFs over the last year and is strongly inclined to support our role (except of course in any financial way). I think it sees us as fitting into its concepts of "localism" and grass-roots involvement. To this end the government organised two national conferences for LAF members in the last year, and has supported the creation of a national online forum for LAF members. I'm not sure where quite what the government is seeking from this, but clearly it wants LAFs to be, not just isolated advisors to their own authorities, but in some more collective way to provide an independent view of policies and objectives. However this is seen, sharing experiences, problems and, solutions, with other LAFs, can only be beneficial to everyone, not least the authorities who we are here to advise. So, it might be an interesting year to come for LAFs.

Christopher Padley

Chair

Mid Lincolnshire

Local (Countryside) Access Forum

South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forum

A feature of our deliberations during the past year has been to ensure greater public awareness of the possible end of public access to grant aided permissive paths; we are issuing a press release and are attempting to make contact with parish councils to advise them of the impending end of government grant to fund the Higher Level Stewardship scheme

We have been invited by DEFRA to comment on the Governments proposed changes to their policy and legal framework of the Public Rights of Way Act; hopefully the new framework will avoid much of the currently frustrating legislation and will streamline procedures. Paths for Communities scheme was introduced in May; applications for grant must include a new PROW plan; this new initiative will be considered in detail by members at their next meeting.

As I approach the closure of my period as Chairman of the forum, I must record my appreciation of the unstinted support I have received from members and officers during the past five years

Brian Montgomery

Chair

South Lincolnshire and Rutland

Local (Countryside) Access Forum

Role and Purpose of Local Access Forums

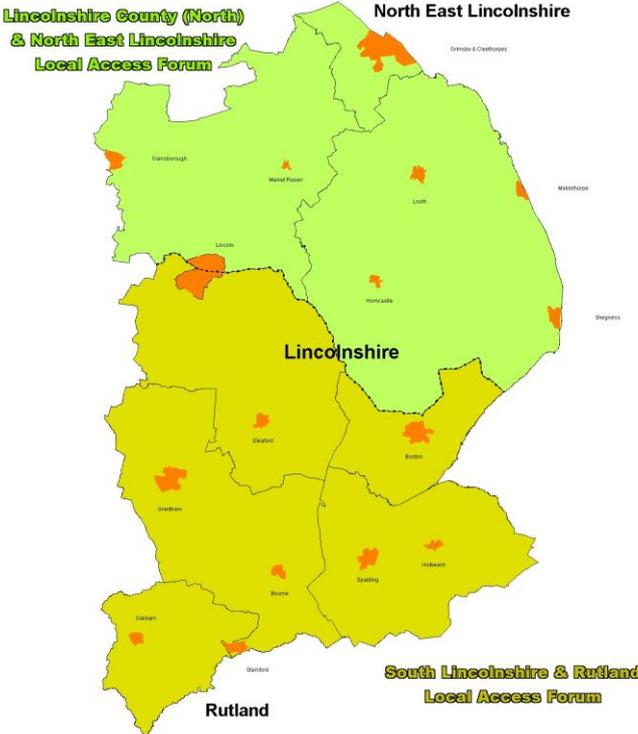
Local Access Forums (LAFs) are statutory bodies established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Two LAFs were established in 2003, covering Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire and Rutland. The Mid Lincolnshire LAF (Mid Lincs Forum) is a joint forum between Lincolnshire County Council and North East Lincolnshire Council. The South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF (South Lincs Forum) is a joint forum between Lincolnshire County Council and Rutland County Council.

Lincolnshire County Council provides a secretariat service to both Local Access Forums.

Local Access Forums provide independent advice to the local authorities and other relevant bodies on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open- air recreation, in ways which address social, economic and environmental interests.

The Mid Lincolnshire and South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local Access Forums provide advice on three main areas:

- the development of recreation and access strategies which cater for a wide range of people;
- improving the rights of way network; and
- the implementation, management and review of the statutory right of access to the countryside.



Membership of Local Access Forums

Each LAF consists of up to 18 members representing a wide range of interests, including rights of way users, land managers and farmers, rural business, health, heritage, nature conservation, tourism, transport, disability groups and minority groups.

Members are appointed for up to three years and the appointing authority is required to maintain a balance of interests on each forum.

A list of members and their areas of interest is shown in the membership section of the Annual Report.

Changes in membership and appointments

-Mid Lincs Forum

Mary Finch stood down in May at the end of her third term of office. Mary was one of the original Mid Lincs LAF members. Ronald Flintham was appointed to the forum in June 2011 to represent the interests of disabled users. Richard Graham joined the forum in October 2011 to represent the interests of walkers and health walking.

-South Lincs Forum

Michael Brearley and Vera Woolmer both resigned from the South Lincs and Rutland LAF in May 2011. Alan Gibbon and John Law joined the LAF in July and October respectively.

Councillor Brian Montgomery replaced Councillor Peter Golden as the Rutland County Council representative in May 2011.

-Chair appointments

Chris Padley was re-elected as Chair of the Mid Lincs Forum and Brian Montgomery was re-elected as Chair of the South Lincs Forum at the July Annual General Meetings.

Review of meetings and discussions of the past year

Meeting Details

Both forums held 4 full meetings during the reporting period 2011/12. Meetings have been held at the following venues:

Mid Lincs LAF	South Lincs and Rutland LAF
12 April 2011 – Horncastle	13 April 2011 - Stamford
19 July 2011 – Anderby	6 July 2011 – Grantham
11 October 2011 – Caistor	12 October 2011 - Oakham
24 January 2012 – Horncastle	25 January 2012 – Lincoln

The average attendance rate for the Mid Lincs LAF during the reporting period was 79.5% and the South Lincs and Rutland LAF was 66.5%.

Members of the public are welcome to attend and observe local access forum meetings and members of the public and other interested parties who would like to raise items for consideration by the forums may do so by contacting the Secretary.

Agendas and minutes can be viewed on Lincolnshire County Council's website by searching the Committee Records System at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/laf

Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP)

Lincolnshire County Council

The first Lincolnshire Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan was published in April 2007. The five year plan has been implemented under four themes, each with a strategic aim and supporting the wider social objectives of the County Council including the aims of the LTP2:

- Sustainable Transport – *Strategic Aim to increase the use of the network for sustainable transport and utility trips*
- Health and Well-being – *Strategic Aim to make it easier for people to incorporate exercise into their daily lives and lead healthier lifestyles*
- Rural Economy and Tourism – *Strategic Aim to support local businesses and tourism through access improvements*
- Social Issues – *Strategic Aim to enable more people to enjoy walking and riding*

There is also a separate strand of Core Tasks that will assist in the management of the network and access opportunities.

During the final year of implementation (2011/12) efforts have been focussed on improving paths in close proximity to villages and towns and improving paths which form part of promoted routes. Both forums have continued to receive quarterly updates on the improvements which have been achieved during the implementation of the plan.

The LAFs have also been kept informed on the development of the second Lincolnshire ROWIP. A great deal has changed since the publication of the first ROWIP and ROWIP 2 will have to take account of significant changes in National policy and the current economic climate. ROWIP 2 will have an increased emphasis on community involvement and partnership work as a result of the County Council's decreased capability to deliver the plan on its own. It is envisaged that both LAFs will be instrumental in the development and implementation of ROWIP2.

North East Lincolnshire Council

North East Lincolnshire Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan was published in August 2008. The Mid Lincs LAF has received regular updates on the implementation of the ROWIP from Councillor Colquhoun.

Rutland County Council

Stuart Crook, public rights of way officer, Rutland CC, has provided regular progress reports to the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF on the implementation of the Rutland ROWIP.

Work on the second Rutland CC ROWIP commenced in late 2011. The document will be structured around seven strategic aims and will adopt a similar format to that used in the third Local Transport Plan. The Local Strategic Partnership has already undertaken a consultation exercise as a part of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The LAF will be involved in development of ROWIP2 during 2012/13.

Budgets and Future Service Delivery

The effect of reduced budgets on future service delivery has been a prominent issue for both forums during the reporting period.

The Government published details of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. The Spending Review set out how the Government intended to implement the national deficit reduction plan.

Lincolnshire County Council

On 13 December 2010 the Government announced that the main general revenue grant funding for Lincolnshire County Council would be reduced by £26.7m, with a further reduction of £16.1m in the following year. The reduction equated to 18% over the two years.

The reduction in funding led to significant cuts in Lincolnshire County Council's PRow and countryside access service and in particular the County Council's ability to implement the Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

The effect of the reduced PRow budget;

- Decreasing the number of PRow posts from 25.5 to 16 posts,
- A reduction in the frequency of seasonal vegetation cutting schedule from 3 to 2 cuts per season,
- 60% reduction in the general maintenance budget,
- 100% cut in the countryside promotion budget,
- Reduced ROWIP implementation.

As a result of reduced funding, efforts are now being made to increase the level of public participation in the management of Lincolnshire's public rights of way network. A number of initiatives are now under development including an adopt –a-path scheme, the use of volunteers for network surveys and practical maintenance projects.

Rutland County Council

The South Lincs and Rutland LAF was informed that the Rutland CC public rights of way budget was largely unchanged by current economic issues. The budget associated with transport strategy section (capital) showed a small rise in line with inflation whilst highways operations (revenue) experienced a slight reduction in PRow

funding due to small under spend the previous year. Consequently service delivery, the structure of the rights of way section and the number of staff employed in Rutland all remain unchanged despite the reduced levels of funding for local authorities

North East Lincolnshire Council

North East Lincolnshire entered into a 10 year Regeneration Partnership arrangement with Balfour Beatty in July 2010 to deliver a number of services including North East Lincolnshire Highways of which the Public Rights of Way service is part. The Partnership has worked with North East Lincolnshire Council to address the impact of the Government funding cuts on the services delivered by Balfour Beatty. The Mid Lincs LAF was informed that there would be no adverse implications on the delivery of the Public Rights of Way service for the foreseeable future. The Partnership is committed to ensuring that the Public Rights of Way service is delivered efficiently and effectively and is committed to delivering the aims and objectives of the North East Lincolnshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Access to MOD Land

During the Second World War a number of rights of way in Lincolnshire and Rutland were stopped up to enable the construction of airfields. The general issue of public rights of way crossing Ministry of Defence (MoD) land is an issue which has been discussed at the East Midlands LAF Chair's meeting and at both Lincolnshire forums.

The construction of Fulbeck airfield in Lincolnshire involved stopping up a number of public rights of way to create cul-de-sac routes. The MoD has recently sold Fulbeck airfield to a private company without restoring any public access. Unfortunately the forums were unaware of the land sale and as a result were unable to negotiate with the MoD to reinstate the affected public rights of way. The MoD is not planning to sell any additional land in Lincolnshire or Rutland during the next 5 years. The forums stressed the need for the MoD to consider the public rights of way before selling land.

Lindsey Trail

The Lindsey Trail is a long distance multi user trail which passes through the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The 69 mile long route is suitable for carriage drivers, horse riders, cyclists and walkers. The route mainly uses the existing public highway network incorporating both surfaced and unsurfaced quiet lanes, byways and restricted byways.

The initial concept and route development was undertaken by Sheila Brookes of the Mid Lincs LAF and members of the Poacher Harness Club. The Mid Lincs LAF has been involved in the development of the trail during the last 5 years. The trail was formally opened by Edward Leigh MP on Saturday 16 June 2012.

Higher Level Stewardship – Permissive Access

One of the main aims of Environmental Stewardship is to promote public access and understanding of the countryside. The Higher Level Stewardship scheme enabled

landowners and farmers to enter into a 10 year agreement to provide either linear or open permissive access.

Changes in national policy mean that Natural England is now unable to include permissive access revenue payments in new HLS agreements. As a result, when an agri-environment agreement ends, the agreement holder will not be able to receive further permissive access revenue payments through any subsequent Higher Level Stewardship agreement. Natural England and DEFRA are keen to see that permissive access should continue on a voluntary basis in situations where the provision of permissive linear routes or open access has proved to be of public benefit.

The forums have recognised the useful nature of some HLS paths and the links which they can provide in the public rights of way network. In excess of 240 miles of HLS access will be lost from the countryside access network in Lincolnshire and Rutland in the coming years in.

John Law, of the South Lincs and Rutland LAF, has been working with parish councils to raise awareness of the routes which would be lost as a result of the funding ending. It is hoped that this exercise will ensure that some of the more useful routes will be retained through permissive path agreements wherever possible.

Huddle

Both Chairmen introduced 'Huddle' at the October meetings. Huddle is an online network that allows LAF members, Natural England and DEFRA to connect, share and work together easily.

Members were invited to attend training sessions at Nottingham in January and Lincoln in March. Two representatives from each forum have now volunteered to act as Huddle Champions.

Other Topics Discussed

- The management of Sewstern Lane/ the Drift
- Equestrian access to Morkery Wood
- Draft National Planning Framework

Consultation Responses

- The Sale of the Public Forest Estate
- Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Consultation – Review of Statutory Duties placed on local Government
- The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature – The Natural Environment White Paper.

Presentations

The South Lincs and Rutland LAF received a presentation from Sarah Attrill regarding the development of the Witham Valley Country Park.

Forum Expenditure

Mid Lincs Forum

Democratic Services support	£1,200
Member travel expenses	£117.10
Sub Total	£1,317.10

South Lincs and Rutland Forum

Democratic Services support	£1,200
Member travel expenses	£445.80
Sub Total	£1,645.80
Total	£2,962.90

Membership

Mid Lincolnshire Local (Countryside) Access Forum		
Name	Area of Interest	End Date of Appointment
Sheila Brookes	Carriage driving	July 2012
Mary Finch (1)	Carriage driving, Access for people with disabilities	July 2011
Alison Healey	Land Management/ Horse riding, Health	July 2012
Christopher Padley	Walking, Cycling	July 2014
Raymond Shipley	Conservation/ Game keeping	July 2013
Peter Skipworth	Walking, Conservation, Tourism	July 2014
Irene Unsworth	Farming, Rural Business	July 2014
Dr. Christopher Allison	Walking	July 2012
Colin Smith	Walking, Health Walking	July 2014
Ronald Flintham (2)	Disabled Access	July 2014
Richard Graham (3)	Health Walking, Walking	July 2015
Councillor IB Colquhoun	Local Authority Representative	n/a
Councillor E. N. Bauer	Local Authority Representative	n/a
Councillor D. C. Hoyes	Local Authority Representative	n/a

- (1) Mary Finch Resigned May 2011
- (2) Ronald Flintham appointed June 2011
- (3) Richard Graham appointed October 2011

South Lincolnshire and Rutland Local (Countryside) Access Forum		
Name	Area of Interest	End Date of Appointment
Bryan Bowles	Farming / Land Management	July 2012
Rosemary Harris	Landowner, Local History	July 2013
Michael Brearley (1)	Farming / Land Management	July 2011
Audrey Morley	Farming, Horse Riding	July 2012
William Cross	Land Management	July 2014
Alec Hill	Recreational Motoring	July 2013
George Keeping	Walking, Cycling, Outdoor Pursuits	July 2013
Gordon Norris	Walking, Access for people with disabilities	July 2012
Alan Gibbon (2)	Walking	July 2014
John Williams	Walking	July 2012
John Law (3)	Other Interests	July 2014
Vera Woolmer (4)	Regeneration	July 2011
Ian Cox	Countryside Management	July 2012
Graham Law	Walking	July 2012
Councillor B. Montgomery (5)	Local Authority Representative	n/a
Councillor R. Wootten	Local Authority Representative	n/a
Councillor D. Brailsford	Local Authority Representative	n/a
Councillor P. Golden (5)	Local Authority Representative	n/a

- (1) Michael Brearley resigned May 2011
- (2) Alan Gibbon appointed July 2011
- (3) John law appointed October 2011
- (4) Vera Woolmer Resigned May 2011
- (5) Councillor Brian Montgomery replaced Councillor Peter Golden as the Rutland County Council representative in May 2011.

Contacts

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Further information about the work of the Local Access Forums is available at
www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/countryside