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Dear Lord Benyon

**CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS IN RELATION TO
PAYMENT FOR PERMISSIVE ACCESS**

Rutland Countryside Access Forum (the Local Access Forum) is pleased to see that there is a possibility of funding for permissive access returning (reference Hansard - Lord Benyon 27th May 2021). We note that you have already implemented this in National Parks and AONB. From January 2023 you are also going to provide the opportunity for payment for allowing access to woodland.

We will be delighted to see funding for permissive access return to the County of Rutland and I am sure other LAFs will also welcome this.

However, we do have a number of concerns in relation to how funding was provided in the past through HLS and the Countryside Stewardship schemes. From surveys undertaken by the Leicestershire, Mid Lincolnshire, South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAFs between 2011 and 2013 it was apparent that:

- a. Local people in the vicinity of a number of the permissive routes were not aware of the routes, due to signage not in place.
- b. A number of routes were difficult to use due to the lack of maintenance.
- c. A number of routes which were deemed suitable for wheelchairs were not.
- d. There were a number of routes that had no value for walkers, cyclists or horse riders.

As Local Access Forums are advisory bodies, we feel we should be consulted in relation to the rules, processes and routes relating to funded permissive access.

We are concerned about allowing dogs on permissive access routes, as we believe that this will discourage farmers/landowners considering payment for permissive access schemes. We feel that the permissive access signage should state dogs only allowed on short leads and restricted to the permissive route. In relation to dog waste, included in the funding should be the cost of dog waste bins, where councils are prepared to dispose of the waste at no extra charge. The signage should include "All dog waste should be disposed of in the dog waste bin or taken home".

The original permissive access signs were too small. The future signs need to be easily recognised from the roadside. The signs should display the title of the scheme, the map of the route, items of interest such as wildlife, the type of user allowed, a contact number for any problems and the start and end date of the permissive access. Where there are a number of routes on the same site, it would be beneficial for users to see a site map displaying the other routes, as well as the one for the individual route.

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If future funded permissive routes are time limited as previous, we would like to see the start of the time period for access be when the route is fully opened to users and not during the preparation for opening the route to the public.


We believe your access to woodland should ensure that walkers do not cause damage for ground nesting birds. We feel people accessing these woods should be encouraged to walk on paths which do not interfere with the fauna and flora. It is essential that if dogs are allowed in these woodlands they are kept on short leads.

We applaud your promotion of wheelchair friendly routes but feel that additional funding should be provided to motivate farmers/landowners to offer this. We recommend that there are three levels of funding for the route surface. The basic level (Level A) being a natural surface, Level B being an improved surface and Level C (the highest level) being suitable for wheelchairs. Level C payments should comply with the guidance published in the Fieldfare Trust Countryside For All, Good Practice Guide with regard to acceptable surfaces, gradients, cross slopes and passing places.

As mentioned earlier, we will be pleased to see additional routes in the countryside through funded permissive access and especially suitable routes for the disabled. We do wish to ensure the funded permissive routes are fit for purpose and I have attached a process which could assist in ensuring the routes funded are appropriate. The attached flow chart is from part of the 2013 Permissive Paths – The Future report, which was sent to Natural England by the South Lincolnshire and Rutland LAF some years ago. The flow chart outlines a process which could be used to involve LAFs in assessing the value of the application in relation to permissive access. It is also imperative that a web site is created to promote these routes, similar to the web site Natural England used to promote these routes in the past. Some Highway Authorities previously had a link to this site on their PROW web page and this helped people to be aware of the existence and location of these permissive access sites/routes.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

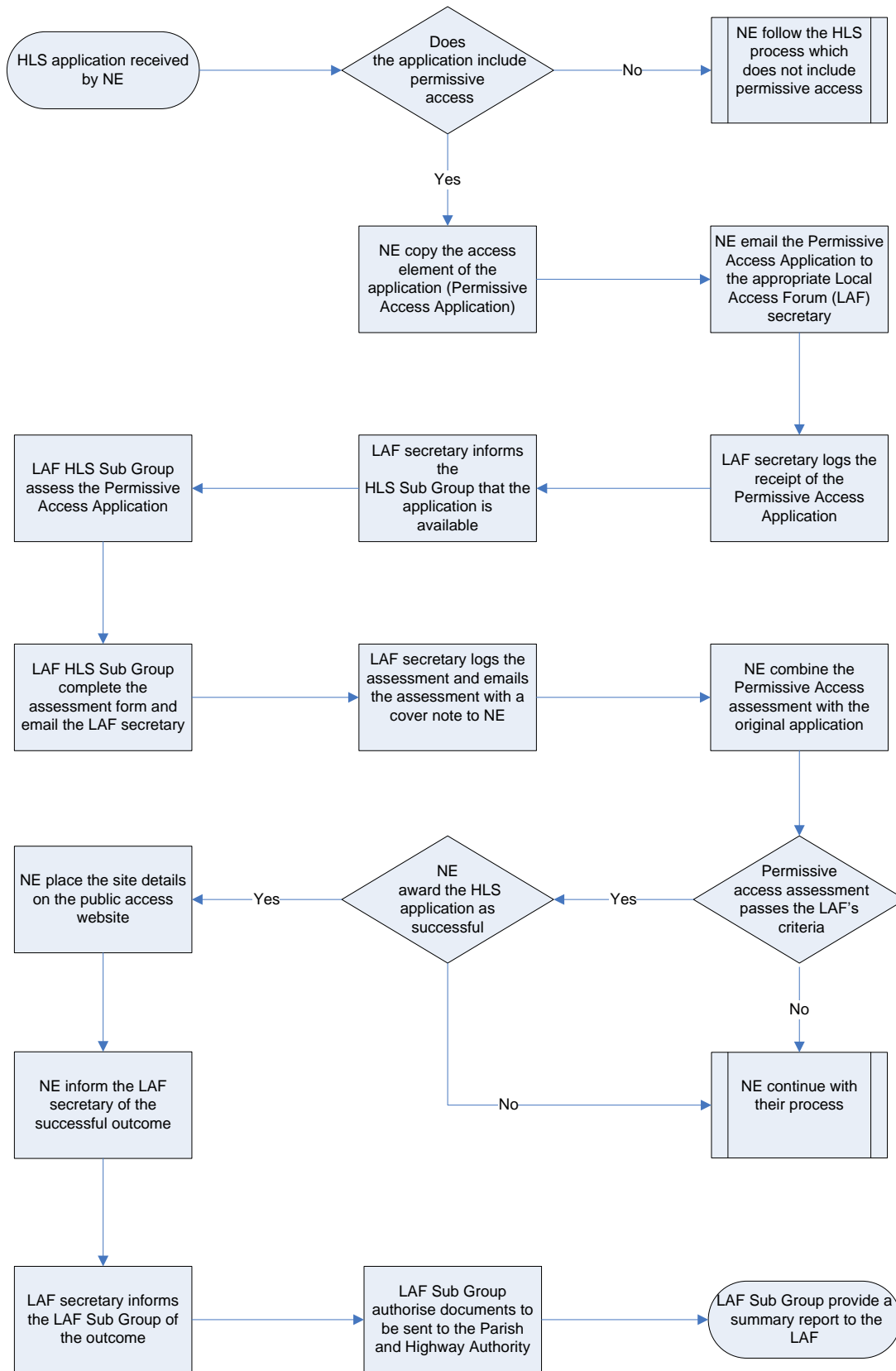
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Councillor Andrew Brown
Chair of the Rutland Countryside Access Forum

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**POSSIBLE PERMISSIVE ACCESS
ASSESSMENT PROCESS**



NE = Natural England, HLS= Higher Level Stewardship or equivalent funding application.

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