

Hertfordshire Local Access Forum

ANNUAL REPORT 2003-2004



www.hertsdirect.org/laf

This is the first annual report of the Hertfordshire Local Access Forum and contains details of the work undertaken and the advice given, since the Forum was established in August 2003. This report fulfils the requirements of the “Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2002” and guidance set out in a letter from DEFRA dated 26 July 2002.

Introduction from the Appointing Authority

- **Establishing a forum:** Over 150 organisations were consulted on matters associated with the establishment of a forum including geographical extent, size of membership and the skills/knowledge of members. Views were also sought on the recruitment campaign.
- **Geographical extent:** All adjoining London Boroughs, County Councils and Unitary Authorities were consulted on the extent of any forum to include Hertfordshire. Following consultation it was agreed to establish a single forum for Hertfordshire.
- **Size of forum:** Following consultation it was agreed that membership should be nearer the minimum (i.e. 12), with the option to grow in the future.
- **Skills / Knowledge:** The consultees identified the importance of strategic thinking, clear identification of interests and enthusiasm for improving access – these were incorporated into the recruitment pack.
- **Recruitment:** The recruitment campaign began in February 2003 with a short article in the County Council’s newspaper HertsDirect. Letters were also sent to all Parish and Town councils, user groups and other local, regional and national bodies. The public were informed through the local press and the www.hertsdirect.org website and also by the use of public notice boards, press releases, and an advertising and poster campaign. 64 individuals requested a copy of the recruitment pack and 37 completed applications were received. Half of these were submitted using an online application form. 14 candidates were shortlisted to attend the second stage of the recruitment process and from these 10 were chosen based on the skills they demonstrated in the group discussions and the requirement to recruit a balance of interests. A further 2 Councillors were then nominated to represent the County Council and Hertfordshire’s 10 District Councils bringing the total to 12. County Councillor Derrick Ashley (Executive Member of Environment – with ultimate responsibility for the County Councils activity as appointing authority) congratulated the new members and welcomed them onto the Forum at their first informal meeting held on 15 July, 2003.

Who is on your Local Access Forum?



Peter Ambrose	Walker, Cyclist
Sue Barrett	Conservation, Horse riding
Cllr Mary Bayes	County Councillor, Chairman Herts Rural Forum
Rosemary Butler	Environmental management
Cllr Rebecca Foy	District Councillor
Debbie Hougie	Countryside recreation education, walking
Liddy Lawrence	Needs of elderly and minority groups, walking and cycling
Lynn Myland	Land owner, horse-rider
Mike Render	Forestry, Chilterns AONB
Charmaine Smith	Landscape, horse riding
Roger Thomas	Estate management
Anne Wilkinson	Horse riding

The Forum elected Liddy Lawrence as Chairman for the first 2 years and Roger Thomas as vice-chairman.

Training

An informal meeting was held on 15 July 2003 for LAF Members to meet each other, to introduce the purpose of the forum and identify particular subjects for further training. A training day was then held on 13 August 2003 where LAF Members were given an overview of the County Council and its Rights of Way function. The Countryside Agency also introduced the new rights of access and key user groups were invited to 'set out their stalls' with respect to their needs and demands. Presentations included the British Horse Society, Open Spaces Society / Bushey & District Footpath Society / Ramblers Association, Cyclists Touring Club and Trail Riders Fellowship.

Meetings and attendance



Four meetings were held in the first year of the Forum at a range of different venues.





- 22 Sept 2003 - Woolmer Green Village Hall, Woolmer Green, Welwyn Hatfield
- 12 Nov 2003 - Oaklands College, St Albans
- 4 Feb 2003 - Stevenage Borough Football Club, Stevenage
- 19 May 2003 - Hollybush Hall, Chorleywood, Three Rivers

Agendas are circulated to a wide list of interested parties and posted on the HertsDirect website. Local press advertising is also carried out to encourage members of the public to attend. Unfortunately this has had limited success with public attendance ranging between 7 and 3. Attendance by the Forum members has been good with the substantial majority of members attending all four meetings. One member has not been able to attend any meetings and a replacement is currently being sought.



What has the Local Access Forum been doing?



The Forum has been consulted and considered advice on the following during its first year.

	Subject	Date
 The Countryside Agency	Draft Maps of Open Country	22 Sep 2003
 Hertfordshire	Rights of Way Improvement Plan – report on preparatory work	22 Sep 2003
	County Access Strategy	
	DEFRA circular: Implementing the new right of access	12 Nov 2003
	Rights of Way Improvement Plan – report on initial assessment	
	Rights of Way Improvement Plan – report on next steps	4 Feb 2004
 Local Government Association Access Advisory Group	National Countryside Access Forum	12 Nov 2003
 The Chilterns AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY	Chilterns Local Access Forum Event	5 Dec 2003

A number of further consultations have been received but the frequency of meetings has not permitted the Forum to compile a full response to these. However, individual responses from members are incorporated into the response from the County Council as appropriate.

 The Countryside Agency	Revisions to the Country Code	
 defra	Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Rights of Way	19 Mar 2004
	Proposals for regulations under section 38 – appeals relating to notices	2 Jun 2004

Cost of the Forum



Herts County Council, as Appointing Authority, pays the above-the-line costs for administering the LAF using money allocated for the fulfilment of duties arising from the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. LAF members however, give up their time voluntarily (i.e. for free) and therefore the Forum relies upon its members in a more profound way than it does on HCC.

Establishment Costs to Mar 2004*	
Stationary (Logo, headed paper, compliment slips, folders)	£5315.00
Recruitment pack, venue, refreshments	£1392.50
Public meetings (venues, refreshments, advertising, expenses)	£1086.25
Total to end March 2004	£7793.75

*Figures in the table do not take into account the following costs: Officer time in establishing and administering the forum; postage costs or time costs associated with attendance of forum members and or speakers at meetings.

Forum website



The LAF has had its own pages hosted on the County Council website.

www.hertsdirect.org/laf

Activity has varied with over 400 individual visitors to the site of whom 140 visited more than once. A total of 2900 hits were made with visitors spending on average 5 minutes browsing the site. By far the greatest interest was shown in the members bibliographies accounting for three-quarters of all visits.

What's in store for the coming year?



The Local Access Forum will have a significant role to play in advising the County Council on its Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The next twelve months will also see the introduction of key parts of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 including 'open access' on all of the County's common land, the re-designation of RUPPs and new regulations relating to the use of motorised vehicles off-road.

Further information on the Local Access Forum can be requested from the LAF Secretary
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