

Hertfordshire Local Access Forum

ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007



www.hertsdirect.org/laf

This is the fourth annual report of the Hertfordshire Local Access Forum and contains details of the work and the advice given, in the period 2006-2007.¹

Introduction

There have been changes at a national level that have had, and will have, an impact on the work of LAFs. New LAF regulations and supporting guidance came into force on 19th March 2007. The range of bodies which LAFs can advise has been extended to include Sport England, AONBs and parish councils - access now includes everyday access as well as recreational use of the countryside.

Locally links are growing - the LAF have nominated a member to represent them on the Hertfordshire Rural Forum.

Another significant change is the formation of Natural England which has now replaced the Countryside Agency, English Nature and the Rural Development Service. Natural England will take some time to settle into new structures and LAFs will have a role to play in promoting access at a regional and national level.

Forum meetings and business continues to be well supported by Forum members and County Council officers. There is a good working relationship - with officers regularly asking for the forum's advice in relevant areas of their work.

Preparations are now well under way for the LAF's first annual conference for parish councils to be held in October 2007. The aim is to organise similar events in the future to inform the LAF's strategic overview of access – by developing more direct links between the LAF and access issues at a local level.

Liddy Lawrence, Chair.

¹ This report fulfils the requirements of the "Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2007" and guidance set out in "Guidance on Local Access Forums" from DEFRA dated February 2007

Who is on your Local Access Forum?



Cllr Rosemary Gilligan	District Councillor representing the Herts LGA
Cllr Bill Storey	County Councillor
Oliver Blowey	Cycling
Diana Collingridge	Estate management
Tony Ferrari	Cycling and Motorised users
Debbie Hougie	Countryside recreation education, walking
Liddy Lawrence (Chairman)	Needs of elderly and minority groups, walking and cycling
Lynn Myland	Land owner, horse-rider
Mike Render	Forestry, Chilterns AONB
Norman Jones	Walkers, non car owners and public transport.
Roger Thomas (Vice Chairman)	Estate management
Marian Whittaker	Horse riding

Anne Wilkinson resigned during the year and the LAF would like to thank her for her contribution.

There are currently two vacancies on the forum and a recruitment campaign will be launched in the autumn of 2007.

What has the Local Access Forum been doing?



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

	Subject	Date
	Implementation of RoWIP	Ongoing
	Rights of Way and planning	27th Feb 2007
	Rights of Way information leaflets	5 th Jun 2007
	Commons Act	27 th Feb 2007
	Right to Apply	5 th Jun 2007
	Access to Coast	September 2007
	Cycle route implementation	5 th June 2007
	Development EIA consultation	5 th June 2007

A number of groups have been invited to participate in forum meetings.

Railway trails and access	Cycling initiatives	Countryside management & access

Meetings and attendance

Three public meetings were convened during this period at a range of different venues.

- 5 Sept 2006 – Pearse House, Parsonage Lane, Bishops Stortford.
- 27 Feb 2007 – The Marlborough Club, St Albans.
- 5 June 2007 – Central Primary School, Watford.

Agendas are circulated to a wide list of interested parties and posted on the “Hertsdirect” website. Local advertising is also carried out to encourage members of the public to attend. Attendance has improved from last year with an average of 6 members of the public attending meetings. Attendance by the Forum members has been good with between 7 and 10 members at meetings and apologies from those not able to attend.

In addition two development meetings were held, for LAF members to explore some issues in more depth

- 14 November 2006 – Rights of Way and Planning
- 27 March 2007 – LAF Development

Training and outside events

The chairman and secretary attended a training event on developing LAFs at Thetford on 15th November 2006.

Three LAF members and the secretary attended a regional LAF conference in Ely on 22nd February 2007.

A LAF member attended a Natural England conference on Health and the Natural Environment at Lords on 18th June 2007.



1. Access and the planning system

LAF members had an introduction to the range of plans that could have a bearing on access and worked out an approach for the LAF to engage with these processes. These were:

- The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) should be referenced in the appropriate sections of Local Development Frameworks.
- Access should be promoted in strategic plans such as Sustainable Community Plans produced by Local Strategic Partnerships.
- The LAF would also like the opportunity to comment on major schemes such as the development proposed to the west of Stevenage.

2. LAF Development meeting

LAF members met to review the work of the LAF and identify themes and issues that they felt should be worked on in the coming year.

- The LAF members wanted to promote the work of the LAF more widely and develop contact with a wide range of interests and people. To help this happen the decision was taken to organise a conference for Parishes in October 2007 and that there should be work to develop the LAF website.
- An action plan was developed to guide the programming of the LAF meetings – two key themes were roads and cycling which were raised at formal meetings.
- Youth was identified as an ongoing area for attention. There has been some work in the past - consultation with young people was part of the work done to prepare the RoWIP. Also the LAF members took an opportunity to meet with students from the University of Hertfordshire in 2005. The challenge of working with youth is not unique to the LAF and Rights of Way Improvement Plans. Young people need support to participate in the traditional channels of meetings and draft documents.

3. Summer Field Trip

The theme for the Forum's summer field trip was "Impact of Roads on Access". Forum members toured a number of sites looking a range of problems and solutions – this culminated in a practical demonstration, by one of the LAF members, of an at-grade horse crossing on the A414 near Colney Heath.



Photo – LAF members on Summer Field Trip at Horse Crossing on A414

The trip started at Smug Oak Lane near Bricketwood where the verge has been surfaced to create an off road route for pedestrians, horseriders and cyclists – which also links a number of rights of way.

Members were impressed by the cloverleaf crossing near Watford which opened last year after many years of hard work (since the early 90's) by Hertsmere Borough Council, local users and the police. Horses, cyclists and walkers can now get across the A41 without having to risk mixing with busy traffic. This is a landmark scheme as it is the first time that non motorised users have been allowed

to legally use a motorway verge – requiring ministerial permission to vary Section 16 of the Highways Act 1980 for the M1.

At Tykeswater Lane the LAF members were able to see the potential difficulties when rights of way are added to the definitive map or have their status changed. The change in status of Tykeswater from footpath to byway was confirmed in 2005 – however there are serious concerns about the safety of users on horse back and in vehicle when joining Theobald Street from the right of way.

An example of measures that have been put in place to improve crossing was seen at the “Pegasus” crossing on Bell Lane near London Colney – a light controlled crossing with specific provision for horses. However they are not a universal solution as they can only be sited on suitable stretches of road with adequate visibility. Cost is also an issue.

A stretch of the A414 highlighted typical problems faced by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders where access routes cross busy roads. It is difficult to convey in words the impact of the horse crossing demonstration – at grade crossings certainly must deter use by some people – as this exercise was tackled by a very experienced rider on a quiet and calm horse.

Cost of the Forum



The Forum is a voluntary body, with the members giving up their time for free. Herts County Council, as Appointing Authority, also contributes officer time and pays for any 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'.

For 2006/2007 these costs have totalled £878.26 broken down as follows:

Meetings (3 public and 3 informal) - venues, refreshments - £878.26

In addition there have been other (small) associated costs, such as postage and mileage expenses, however, these have been absorbed by the County Council.

What's in store for the coming year?



- Actions from the parishes conference
- RoWIP work programmes – challenges of funding
- Impact of roads on rights of way
- Development of LAF web pages
- Looking at the interests of young people
- Commons management – new legislation and procedures enacted
- Access to water
- Linking access to health

Forum website



The LAF has its own web pages on the County Council website, where up to date information about LAF meetings is stored: www.hertsdirect.org/laf

If you would like further information on the Local Access Forum, or wish to contact any of its members please see the contact information below.

Andy Hardstaff, LAF Secretary:

Tel: 01727 848168

Email: andy.hardstaff@hertsc.gov.uk

Alternatively you can write to:

Hertfordshire LAF Secretary, c/o Environmental Management Group, Environment Department, Hertfordshire County Council, County Hall, Pegs Lane, HERTFORD SG13 8DN