

**Notes of the West Midlands Regional Local Access Forum (LAF) Meeting  
24 July 2012**

In attendance:

Herefordshire	Arthur Lee	Chair
Worcestershire	Gerry Taggart	Chair
	Richard Jones	Secretary
Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull	Joe Carroll	representative
		Secretary
Staffordshire, Wolverhampton & Stoke on Trent	Peter Pearson	Vice Chair
	Jonathan Lindop	Secretary
Shropshire	Jane Ing	Chair
	Jim Stabler	Sec & Regional Coord
Birmingham	Bob Hunt	Chair
	Mahroof Malik	Secretary
Dudley	Tina Boothroyd	Chair
	Sally Orton	Secretary
Sandwell	No representative	
Walsall	Kevin Gannon	Council Rep
Telford & Wrekin	Jan Mees-Robinson	representative
Natural England (NE)	Angela Smith	
	Moira Halstead	

All were welcomed and the apologies from  
Jo Sheeran from Walsall  
Jaswant Sidhu from Telford & Wrekin  
Sheila Cooper from Warwickshire  
Were noted

**1. Minutes and matter arising from last meeting.**

The notes from the meeting held on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011 were agreed, there were only 3 matter arising:

- NE had agreed to provide a regional/area structural chart. This information is now on Huddle and all can access from there.
- The LAFs had all agreed to write to NE about the removal of access revenue payments from HLS schemes. This had been undertaken by most LAFs but to no avail and the payments have not been reinstated. This is still a retrograde step and not, LAFs believe, in line with the base NE principles.
- The future of National Trails had been noted at the last meeting. It was noted that all LAFs had been consulted on the future of these trails recently.

## **2. Huddle Update**

Huddle was discussed and all were urged to get their LAF membership up to the 5 per LAF that the existing licences allow. The information that is being placed on Huddle is extremely useful as is the best practise being shared on the system. A list showing the current west Midlands Huddle uptake is attached.

In Shropshire a system called Yammer is used at local level in addition to Huddle. *[It should be stressed that this is not in any way a replacement for Huddle, it is used by the Shropshire LAF for internal discussions and the local dissemination of information gleaned from Huddle.]*

There is a new Huddle user guide available and an electronic newsletter that will be distributed to all by NE.

## **3. Information that Natural England Collects from LAFs regularly**

There is now a great deal of information that NE wish to collect from LAFs on a regular basis. This includes:

- Data on Huddle and training events. Note a copy of the statistics for the first quarter is attached for your information, the results to date are positive and above target. Also attached is a proforma for collecting the data which all LAFs are requested to complete and send to the Jim Stabler before the end of each quarter.
- There is a contact list being produced showing LAF Chars, Vice chairs and secretaries. At the moment the West midlands is incomplete as it does not show all Vice Chairs or the Huddle users, a copy of the current contact sheet is attached for all to check, complete as required and please return to Jim Stabler.
- Annual Reports which are in a new format and are now called “annual reviews” in order to lessen any possible confusion with LAF’s own internal annual reports. They have been expanded at the request of other LAFs with the addition of a few more questions that are thought of benefit to the LAFs. The reviews are due to be with NE by the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012 at the latest and will cover the period of the financial year 2011- 2012. These reviews will be used by NE staff to write an overall England LAF report
- A copy of the new annual review outline will be forwarded to all LAFs when made available. .

## **4. How can we Increase LAF Membership**

Sally Orton led a discussion on how LAF membership could best be increased. Dudley LAF has undertaken a very successful recruiting drive and now has a full and diverse membership with people on a standby list. There are lessons to be learned from this. During the discussion the following points were noted.

- Write a targeted letter to people you know, inviting them to become a member.
- Get a good geographical and skills mix.

- Add people to a waiting list if necessary.
- Go along to another LAF meeting to see how they run meetings and keep membership healthy.
- Review times/dates/venues of meetings.
- Advertise in a free paper or Local Authority newsletter.
- Include links to LAF website pages on all relevant websites.
- Attract younger members by asking for their social media skills.
- Possible use of social media such as facebook and twitter.
- A current issue is a great way of getting younger members along.
- Show photos of what the LAF achieved the previous year.
- Put information about the LAF on the back of all relevant leaflets (walking, cycling) produced by the Local Authority.

Other points that were discussed included:

- The Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull LAF have used the probation service to provide manpower for works. It costs £110 for the officer to accompany the people but for this you get 8-10 strong young people to work for you.
- Walsall have a volunteer maintenance programme using the Ramblers' Association and their insurance
- There is a differing requirement for urban and rural LAFs and their aims and membership.

## **5. Paths for Communities Grant Scheme**

Angela Smith gave a presentation on the Paths for Communities Project outlining the scheme and the recently amended rules for the project. The main points to note were:

- £2 million funds available for England until 2015.
- Match funding cannot be public funds such as Council, other grants, Parish or section 106/CIL
- The need to provide detailed mapping with post codes to ensure that the paths fall within the definition of rural.
- Match can take the form of volunteer time or gifted items.
- Land in existing stewardship schemes is not eligible
- A one off payment of compensation for landowners is permissible
- Legal fees cannot be claimed
- Needs to be partnership working.
- All applications need to be supported by their local LAF.
- Within the Region 16 Expressions of Interest have already been raised.

Once the final application is submitted it will be assessed by an independent grants panel.

Full details can be found at:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/rightsofway/p4c.aspx>

Or contact Angela Smith direct.

## **6. The Way Forward**

During the Way forward discussions it was agreed that a second Regional Meeting was needed but the date will not be finalised until the date for the next National Conference has been agreed. The Regional Meeting will be arranged for shortly afterwards.

There followed a discussion on what should be on the National Meeting agenda and the following suggestions made:

- LAF membership, promotion and diversity.
- Promotion of LAFs using social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Disabled access training and the greater use of RADAR keys.
- Keeping access land open and limiting the number of barriers being erected on them.
- The need for clarification of the definition and status of quiet lanes and UCRs.
- A talk by the chair of MOSAIC on how to increase the number of ethnic minorities accessing the countryside.
- The latest MENE statistics showing the use of the countryside. Note NE has succeeded in extending this excellent work for a further 3 years.

## **7. Round ups**

### **Regional LAF Coordinator**

- NE is trying to find the funds to keep the Regional Coordinators in post past Mar 2013.
- Much time has been spent trying to keep the contacts list up to date in the past and all are asked to inform the Regional Coordinator of changes in the LAF.

### **Natural England**

All should note that Angela and Moira are now part of the People and Access Team and in addition to liaising with LAFs they run:

- The Country Parks network for park rangers
- Local Nature Reserve dedications.
- Work with Country Park Managers and Rangers to help them to achieve Accredited Country Park status.

### **Worcestershire**

- There is a lot of conflict with cyclists on access matters
- Access land is being more and more restricted with barriers such as fences and hedges being created.
- With funding cuts ROW maintenance is more and more challenging
- The ROWIP is being progressed well.

### **Staffordshire, Wolverhampton & Stoke on Trent**

- Membership is increasing with 17 currently and another being appointed.
- There has been some discussion on what is the real role of the LAF.
- They have a working group that has commented on the HS2 proposals.

### **Birmingham**

- There are still membership problems with not enough breadth of representation.
- There is not enough ethnic minority representation.
- There is no waterways representative at present.
- The LAF deals with a lot of gating orders.
- Cuts in funding is the major issue and has led to the Council having to use the Ramblers more and more to undertake maintenance and ground works.

### **Herefordshire**

- The LAF is working well with active sub groups dealing with issues
- They have an on-going problem with access to a piece of common land.

### **Walsall**

- The LAF is now a statutory consultant with all planning applications where ROWs are involved.
- Budgets and manpower within the access department are getting worse and worse

### **Shropshire**

- Membership has now increased and is at a healthy level.
- All LAFs are different and Shropshire, as a rural LAF, concentrates on land and countryside issues mainly.
- There is still no cyclist representative on the LAF.
- The manpower and funding cuts are causing problems with maintenance.

### **Dudley**

- Funding and resources for access a major problem but the LAF is well supported by the Council and its staff.
- The past problems within the LAF and its relationship with the Council have been resolved after the change in leadership.
- The LAF is working well but still need a couple more members

### **Telford & Wrekin**

- Lots of urban development on-going.
- Full and active membership
- Council committed to multiuser routes policy
- Budget cuts are a major problem.

## **Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull**

- The LAF is working well with a good team of members and some experts. More people from different backgrounds are needed ideally.
- The forum has a good interaction with members of the public and listens to their concerns.
- The cuts in manpower and funding have inevitably led to a loss in expertise.
- There are concerns over the effects of the high speed 2 (HS2) train links on access.
- They have seen fewer gating issues.

## **6. Any Other Business**

The following points were raised:

- There is a need for NE clarification on how to ensure that routes are not dropped of the definitive map post the 2026 cut-off.
- The dissemination of consultations is still a problem and often leads to LAFs not knowing about them until too close to the cut-off date. All Regional Coordinators and NE have agreed to put all known ones on Huddle. In addition to this if anybody finds out about a consultation can the information is disseminated as widely and quickly as possible.
- The date for the next meeting was left until we know the date of the National Conference.

## **After notes**

- Herts LAF use Facebook and Twitter, see:

<http://www.hertslaf.org.uk/>  
<https://twitter.com/HertsLAF>

- There is some guidance on Huddle about 2026 and ensuring routes do not get dropped off, see:

<https://defra.huddle.net/huddleworkspace/whiteboard.aspx?workspaceid=13106522&whiteboardid=18743799>