

After interchanges of thoughts between Leicestershire LAF members via our googlegroup we have agreed the following

LLAF recommendations for funding access and protection of the countryside

Current support for hill farmers in particular, to maintain gates, stiles and other infrastructure on access points to the countryside should be continued after we leave the EU

Beyond this we would like to see targeted support for **permissive access** under **Stewardship/HLS schemes**. **By targeted we mean that it should only be on offer where there is a demonstrable public benefit from the access being offered with priority being given to missing links. Further we feel that such agreements should be better policed than has been the case in the past**

From the permissive access audits in Leicestershire there is been evidence that a number of routes (where payment has been provided) have not been adequately maintained nor properly signposted by the landowner. This has also apparently been the case in the neighbouring counties of Rutland, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. This has not been acted upon due to a lack of inspections and with Natural England likely to have even fewer staff in the future, it is unlikely that this will improve. In the past a number of routes were also provided which had no real value to the public and only benefitted the farmers. This was a complete waste the taxpayers money.

We certainly need to cover the missing links in the network, and take any opportunity to upgrade to higher rights creating safer off-road routes to link PRoW and routes to locations of interest. Paying for permissive access is the right thing to do, however it is important payment is made for routes that are needed and wanted by the public and that are then properly maintained by the farmer. We would also propose that any future HLS permissive access type of funding should also be directed towards smaller privately owned farms and not large corporate or institutional organisations. Bodies like the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust or RSPB have other funding sources they could use to create accessible routes on their land.

We think that it would be good for LAFs to sign up to a letter to this effect to the Minister responsible, but getting a number of LAFs to agree a form of words usually becomes tricky. There are suggestions of starting a petition but again it is agreeing an actual form of words which is the challenge.

Here in Leicestershire we have been promoting retention of HLSS permissive access for some time. Parish Council precepts are not capped so parishes could support local routes where higher authorities have no funds and they feel local routes are of real value.