

Chairman's Report 2011

What a difference a year makes and whilst we knew there were going to be cuts in public spending, no one could imagine how many and where. We were reassured by firstly the Natural England (NE) Regional Director that LAF's were not to be part of the cuts and then later we received a letter from the Minister to praise the work of the LAF's, thank us for our efforts and to give us his continued support. That was not to be the case with the English Access Forum, after consulting with the LAF's it was one of the cuts. As far as I am concerned that was a wise decision.

The axe was to fall not only nationally but also locally, so when I met with our Director and Executive Member last October it was to be informed that we would be losing our Senior Rights of Way Officer who was also our LAF Secretary. At this meeting we all recognised that we needed to do all that was necessary to have a balanced budget and that in the future we needed, as a LAF, to help ourselves more, as well as helping our Council. We approached then and are still approaching now, the situation with a positive outlook. At that meeting I was asked to identify on behalf of the LAF our 5 key priorities for the next 5 years of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). This was done and approved by the LAF and true to his word our Executive Member has made LTP3 money available to take these projects forward. We should now see, in no particular order, the completion of the Festival Way, a link from Nailsea to Clevedon for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, a bridleway across Tyntesfield, an extension of the Strawberry Line from Yatton into Clevedon and a coastal path from Clevedon to Weston-super-Mare. They will not all happen at once and it may take longer than the 5 years but I know that work has already started on some of the projects. What may delay the coastal path is the decision by the Environment Agency to move the shoreline and flood parts of the farmers land in Kingston Seymour. I hope we

will all understand the plight of our landowners in this area and find ways of working with them.

The LAF now has a new team to work with in North Somerset Council (NSC) and if that liaison continues as it has started then we face an exciting future, however we are going to have to help ourselves more, read more of the consultations ourselves and make our own responses and not rely on officers to do this for us. The amount of time we spend on LAF work was an interesting topic of discussion with the NE assistant Director in the South West. We went around the table with each LAF Chairman in the South West giving an estimate of their time and we averaged out somewhere around about 12 hours per week on LAF work. To read many of the documents we have to read takes an inordinate amount of time we then draft responses which then have to be sent around our individual LAF members which all takes time. We then respond to our regional co-ordinator and so the hours all add up. The plus side is that it all keeps the mind very active.

I must finish by acknowledging the work done by those who have retired from the LAF this year and opted not to be re-appointed. From the original eighteen appointments there is only four of us left and of the three councillor appointments only one who has been there from the start. Two of those original appointees have left this year and we must give a large vote of thanks to them both and especially to Barbara Bennett. She was vice-chairman for some time and has crusaded tirelessly for the horse riders, writing most of the horse riding strategy which is encompassed within our RoWIP. We have now interviewed replacements for those retiring members and look forward to an exciting future. Finally my thanks to all of our LAF members for their support during the past year.

Mike Amos
Chairman North Somerset Local Access Forum

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Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2010/11

What is the Local Access Forum (LAF)?

The North Somerset Local Access Forum (LAF) was established under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 their role being to advise the appointing authority, North Somerset Council, on the improvement of public access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment, having regard to the needs of land management and the desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area.

Although established under the auspices of North Somerset Council, the LAF is an independent body. It works under national regulations (revised in March 2007) with a statutory obligation to provide independent and impartial advice.

Who is on the Local Access Forum?

The LAF is a group of sixteen local members of the public (including three North Somerset Councillors) with an interest in access to the countryside. The membership reflects a variety of interests as shown in the table opposite.

List of current members' names with their predominant area of interest.

Rights of way and access land users

Tim Raines
Robert Stephens
Jonathan Brownett
Peter Walker

Landowning interests

Bernard Gray
John Harris
David Hutchings
Robert Parsons
Richard Kent

Other interests e.g. tourism, conservation

Mike Amos *Chairman*
Richard Greenland
Philip Barclay
Robert Rischmiller

NSC Council members

Cllr. Bob Cook
Cllr. Tony Moulin
Cllr Ann Harley



Activities of Local Access Forum during the year

Connect 2 Project – Festival Way

Connect 2 is funded by the BIG Lottery Fund and the Joint Local Transport Plan and includes a project supported by Sustrans, Bristol City Council and North Somerset Council to create a route between Bristol and Nailsea. The route of the Festival Way runs between the Millennium Park in Nailsea to the Cumberland Basin in Bristol.

Proposals to develop the sections between Long Ashton and Bristol have been discussed and a site meeting was held in January with the Chair to look at preferred options either side of the A370 near Yanley Lane.

Coastal access Update

Proposed Coastal Trail Kingston Seymour – Wick St Lawrence

The Forum was updated by local forum members on the Proposed Environment Agency plans to impose a “managed realignment” of the coastline as part of the Severn Estuary flood risk strategy; Members raised concerns about the coastal alignment of the route and the possibility of it being opened to horse riders.

Richard Thomas (Natural England) updated the Forum commenting that the first stage of the process would be a mapping exercise and this would not begin until the Minehead to Brean Down stretch of coast had been completed (1 – 2 years). He emphasised that significant environmental sensitivities associated with the coastal belt linking Weston-super-Mare and Clevedon (Woodspring Bay and Wick Wharf) meant that there were a number of very great, if not insurmountable, challenges facing the proposed alignment of the route.

The Chairman noted that although a scheme for developing the Tidal Trail coast path including a link between Clevedon and Weston-super-Mare

remained in the Council’s RoWIP, it was no longer included within the West of England Sustainable Transport Scheme. He said that the potential for the path now ultimately depended on environmental assessments associated with the Marine and Coastal Access Act.

Joint Local Transport Plan 3 Update

The Joint Local Transport Plan which covers South Gloucester, Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset received final approval in March 2011. The plan covers major funding bids as well as annual funding.

Funding for the North Somerset Rights of Way Improvement Plan is likely to derive from LTP3 funding streams. The Forum considered and prioritised the following schemes:

- The Coastal Footpath;
- The extension of the Strawberry Line to Clevedon (possibly finding synergy with the Council’s own green travel plans to provide sustainable routes for its staff linking Yatton Railway Station with Clevedon);
- The Festival Way extension
- Linking Tyntesfield and Portishead via the bridleway network
- An extended cycleway/footpath linking Nailsea to Clevedon
- Tutshill sluice – River Yeo crossing

North Somerset Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review

The Plan, which has been in existence since October 2007, required revision so it could be integrated with the next phase of the Joint Local Transport Plan.

Members from the Forum formed a working party, and together with Officers, undertook a full review of the plan. This resulted in 17 completed actions being removed from the plan. One action,

which was undeliverable, was also removed. In addition two new actions were inserted so they could be included within JLTP3 programme.

The review also took the opportunity to revise the text to reflect changes in legislation and to make sections clearer.

Local Sustainable Transport Fund

The Chairman updated Members on progress in respect of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund process, referring specifically to schemes under consideration for funding. A bid for North Somerset is being produced and work on a joint bid with the other West of England authorities is being considered.

The scheme is mainly aimed at reducing congestion on the main commuter routes within the district.

Volunteering

‘Woodspring Ramblers’ have been working with North Somerset Council Public Right of Way Team since May 2010 when they carried out their inaugural clearance of wooden steps leading onto the Beach at Uphill. Since then they have carried out works at 11 sites in 8 Parishes and have cleared vegetation from 3470m of paths improving access for users. In addition, working with the Rights of Way officers who have removed other obstructions, a further 1265m of ‘lost paths’ have been re-opened.

A further footpath volunteer group, covering the North of the District, was set up earlier this year. The members are drawn from Nailsea, Clevedon and Portishead walking groups and have successfully cleared paths in Nailsea and Wraxall. They have also recently re-opened a very heavily overgrown route around the old Felton Quarry. This 350m route had not been available for over 15 years and now, once again forms a good off-road link between Felton and Backwell.

Without the support of both of these groups it is

unlikely that these paths could have been cleared or re-opened within the existing available budget. The works have resulted in genuine improvements to the network with access benefits to all users including walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

When and where have we met?

The Forum normally meets four times a year with varied times and venues to enable a larger number of people to attend.

The following meetings were held during 2009/2010:

20 July 2010	Hewish and Puxton Village Hall
12 October 2010	Clevedon Town Council Hall
21 January 2011	Winscombe Community Centre
19 April 2011	Kingston Seymour Village Hall

Would you like to get involved?

All Forum meetings are open to the public and press. Members of the public have the right to speak to the Forum on matters that appear on the agenda. Written notice of their wish to speak must be given at least one working day before the meeting via written to the committee clerk,

The Forum is striving to forge stronger links with Parish and Town Councils. Forum members attend Parish or Town meetings, including one following the publication of the Forum’s Annual Report.