

Other Consultations

The Forum has also submitted formal comments on the following issues:

- The areas of the county covered by the Higher Level stewardship agri-environment schemes funded by the Government department 'Defra'.
- The future of the Access Management Grant Scheme administered by Natural England.
- The Leicestershire Together Partnership's 'Sustainable Community Strategy'.

The Forum – a personal perspective

I joined the Leicestershire Local Access Forum in October 2006 as an ordinary member of the walking public. I'm not affiliated to any of the major outdoors groups such as Ramblers or The British Horse Society; I just love walking and the great outdoors.

As a farmer's wife and without any footpaths on our land, I can readily appreciate the point of view from farmers when walkers let their dogs run among livestock, leave gates open and drop litter but equally not all walkers are like that. My pet hate is litter and I fully endorse Bill Bryson's campaign with the CPRE to try and get litter dropping (or not) into the conscience of the British public. More litter – bins in the countryside might help though, of course, someone has to empty them.

The Forum has had some very interesting meetings with various speakers on 'Green Spaces', other forms of transport and visits to conferences on coastal access and other issues. Not all meetings are, of course, full of exciting items – most of them are, however, relevant to Leicestershire even if the jargon can, at times, be a bit difficult to follow.

Having not missed a meeting yet, I can honestly say that I am fully enjoying my time on the Forum and anyone interested in the countryside and the issues concerning it, such as footpaths, closures, diversions, new green spaces, planning developments affecting paths, etc., would find the Forum very useful and rewarding.

Lorraine Forman



What is the Local Access Forum (LAF)?

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum is an independent official body, set up by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to represent the interests of everyone concerned with public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways and byways) and access to the countryside - including walkers, horse-riders, cyclists, 4x4 users, farmers and landowners, conservation groups, health issues and public transport users.

The Forum covers the area of the Leicestershire County Council (LCC). Another Foru covers the City of Leicester. The Forum debates topical countryside access and recreation issues and advises Government at all levels, and particularly the County Council.

Leicestershire County Council appoints members of the Forum and provides administrative support. The Forum works with LCC but it is an independent body and is wholly responsible for the contents of this report.

For more information on the Forum

See the website at www.leics.gov.uk/laf
An introductory leaflet is available for downloading.

Dates and venues of future Forum meetings

Are on the web at www.leics.gov.uk/llaf_meetings
Members of the public can attend as observers.

Minutes and papers from previous meetings

Are on the web at www.leics.gov.uk/llaf_minutes

For the current membership of the Forum

See on the web at www.leics.gov.uk/llaf_members

To apply to join the Forum

For details go to: www.leics.gov.uk/llaf_join

To contact the Forum

Contact the Forum Secretary at the following address:

Local Access Forum, c/o Countryside Service, Leicestershire County Council, Room 500, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester, LE3 8TE

Telephone: (0116) 305 7086

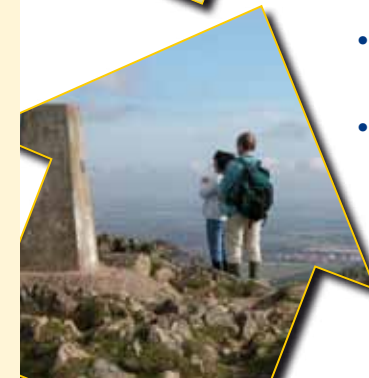
Email: accessforum@leics.gov.uk

**Down
your way**

Promoting Rights of Way and
Countryside Access in Leicestershire

Down your way

Newsletter and 2008-9 Annual Report



- 'Green Routes to New Urban Growth'
- Barrow upon Soar bridleway rail crossing
- Pennbury eco-town
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- The Local Access Forum - a personal perspective

www.leics.gov.uk/laf

leicestershire

Local Access Forum

Promoting Rights Of Way And Access Land



Chairman's Annual Report

Another busy year has seen members of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum come and go and we are currently looking for new members.

Improving the Rights of Way Network

Amongst many issues addressed in past years, we had a substantial input into the Leicestershire Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Flowing from this the Forum is now involved in consultations with Leicestershire County Council (LCC), on an area-by-area basis, about what improvements can be made to the rights of way network with funding via the Local Transport Plan.

As part of the process the LCC officers are tapping into the wealth of local knowledge amongst members of the Forum in identifying any problems and maintenance issues on the existing network, which is bearing fruit in a substantial programme of works. We are also developing and agreeing with the County Council, a wish list of new links etc., which may be introduced if funding becomes available.

Influencing Local & Regional Planning

Another major part of the emphasis this year has been trying to 'Keep Leicestershire Green'. With all the talk of new housing, be it eco-towns or urban extensions, the Forum is keen to support and promote the government's 'Green Infrastructure' guidelines. These aim to ensure the needs of the people for open areas are satisfied and access to them is easy for all.

The Forum pursues this both by responding to national consultations and getting involved at a more local level. We see all strategic planning applications so that we can make recommendations and play an active role regionally in promoting these issues. We have had an input into the Local Development Framework being created by each District Council, and hosted a major seminar on Green Infrastructure and Access in the regional planning context of the 6C's – the 3 Cities & 3 Counties New Growth Point Partnership (involving the City and County Councils of Leicester & Leicestershire, Derby & Derbyshire and Nottingham & Nottinghamshire).

Seminar on Green Infrastructure & Access

The seminar 'Green Routes for New Urban Growth' looked at how local authorities and agencies are juggling major urban development proposals whilst promoting sustainable communities, tackling climate change, aiming to improve health, and working in ever-closer partnerships with each other and with the various user groups. Integrating all these strands can be elusive but the Seminar considered how Green Infrastructure and Countryside Access can help do this.

The seminar was attended by people from numerous regional agencies, county councils, district and parish councils and numerous user groups. Four speakers covered a range of issues with much emphasis on health, the low levels of fitness in the population, and the link between increased activity and health improvements highlighting that activity is more beneficial than weight loss alone.

Natural England underlined the health benefits of access to the outdoors and the British Health Foundation provided data demonstrating the extent of the problem. Examples of schemes which could help were given and it was impressed on representatives present that everyone had a part to play.

Developing 'Green Infrastructure' can play a major part where new access areas and rights of way are used to promote outdoor activity. Networks of natural places, parks and paths bring green space nearer to every doorstep. This encourages walking, running, cycling and horse-riding. Green spaces offer fresh air away from pollution and opportunities to explore nature. All these things boost general well-being and help develop local community identities.

All the speakers' presentations and notes of the discussions can be downloaded from the Forum web homepage www.leics.gov.uk/laf.

Since the seminar a Green Infrastructure Development Co-ordinator has been appointed by Leicestershire County Council to work on behalf of the 6C's Partnership. Her recent presentation to the Forum is also on the Forum's web home page.

Roy Denney, Chairman.

Major Consultations

Barrow upon Soar Bridleway Rail Crossing

Following a not-quite-collision between a dog walker and a train, the bridleway level crossing off Sibley Road at Barrow upon Soar was closed last July at the request of Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate who describe it as "one of the most dangerous crossings in the country". This deprived walkers of a quick route to Barrow's shops, dog walkers of exercise routes on footpaths and horse-riders of a one-hour circuit on bridleways.

Since then there has been intense negotiation between user group representatives, the County Council (as the Highway Authority) and Network Rail to reconcile the public's rights with railway operations. The Forum has tried to bring together these disparate views. Since then a well-attended exhibition was held in Barrow to outline the options, all subject to negotiation with house and land-owners.

The option favoured by the Forum is for a pedestrian bridge at a new site a little way south, with a facility to wheel bikes up and over. Horse riders (and cyclists and walkers) would have a new bridleway, on land mainly owned by British Gypsum, on the east side of the railway between the truncated current bridleway, and the bridleway from Sibley to Walton on the Wolds. This would make the route for horse-riders traffic-free, except for about 300 yards between bridleways on the Hoton Road, making it one of the best short circuits in the county.

Problems identifying land-ownership have slowed things down but Network Rail is under pressure to find, and build, the solution before the temporary closure of the bridleway runs out in September 2009.

Vicky Allen



A Forum meeting in session at County Hall



Proposed Developments: Pennbury Eco-town & Bardon Hill Quarry Extension

Members of Forum have recently been at meetings with the Co-op to talk about the proposed Pennbury eco-town, and have visited Bardon Hill Quarry to discuss their proposed new 'big hole'.

In an ideal world, and from the interests of user groups, it may be we would prefer that neither development happened, but government tells us there is a national need for more stone and more houses. It may seem like supping with the devil, having thrown away the proverbial long spoon, but to preserve or increase access it is essential to talk to developers early in the process so that public access is planned-in from the start, not left out in the cold or covered as an afterthought.

Our county is blessed (if that's the right word) with ancient rocks so it has long been mined for coal, slate and granite as well as contributing its share of river gravels and brick clay.

Pennbury Eco-town

The Co-op held seminars for a number of interest groups including health and transport, which have already resulted in a promise of 11km of new bridleways which will take walkers, cyclists and equestrians to, through, round and out of Pennbury, contributing to healthy exercise and the eco-town's sustainability aims. We haven't yet discussed precisely where these routes will go, which is seen as pointless at this stage, as Pennbury is still a very fluid concept.

Bardon Hill Quarry Extension

On a sunny day in January several Forum members tramped, rather muddily, across the site of the proposed new quarry on the south side of Bardon Hill. Two footpaths cross roughly in the middle of where the new hole will be and must be relocated and/or replaced if the project goes ahead.

As part of the early consultations the Forum is asking for multi-user routes across previously-quarried land - now being restored - as well as round the new quarry. Here, as in much of Charnwood Forest, there's a notable shortage of bridleways but a high population of horses so new routes that cater for cyclists and riders - not just walkers - are important.

The company had already realised that the A511 along one side of the proposed quarry site is a barrier and is working with the County Council Highways Department to make crossing it easier - to get to the existing bus stop - as well as to access the proposed paths.

The Forum is proposing that, in addition to short and medium term compensations, the residue of all this activity will, some years down the road, become a new country park.

Vicky Allen & Roy Denney



Members of the Forum viewing the site of the Bardon Hill Quarry Extension

Planning - Local Development Frameworks

Today's planning system requires developers to consult the community and try to deliver things the community wants as well as the houses, quarries, golf courses, supermarkets or whatever. It also imposes various 'sustainability' targets such as travel-to-work or school travel plans.

A network of 'green routes' helps meet these aims and the Forum is determined to be in there fighting for good access through large new developments and out into the green spaces and the fresh air we all value so much. For these reasons the Forum has also contributed to the Local Development Framework consultations that our District Councils are currently holding.

Vicky Allen

Better Coastal Access and Leicestershire

A landmark trail around England's stunning coastline may be just a step away, following the inclusion of a Marine and Coastal Access Bill in the government's programme for the 2008/9 parliamentary session. For the first time ever this will allow the public to walk from one end of the English coast to the other unhindered.

Visiting the coast is an enormously popular activity, yet much of our coastline is inaccessible. At present you can only walk along it for an hour before encountering an obstruction or diversion inland because of coastal erosion or development. Leicestershire is far from the sea but our residents have a long tradition of visiting the coast and at present have even less knowledge of where they can and cannot go than do the locals.

Various user groups have been campaigning for this to be included in the bill and the Leicestershire LAF supported these efforts during the consultation

stage. The Bill will also give long-overdue conservation protection to our valuable marine environment.

Roy Denney



A Ranger guides visitors at Market Bosworth Park

Temporary Footpath Diversions

Part of the role of the Forum is to ensure systems work properly in the protection of rights of way. In April we were made aware of a complaint from a resident of Castle Donington about the temporary closure of a footpath which runs along the northern side of the motor-racing circuit, crossing several pieces of land owned by the circuit and used during major events, e.g. as camp sites and overspill car parks. The Forum considered that the response from the Highways Department of the County Council (who deal with temporary rights of way closures) did not seem adequate.

Normally the Forum does not deal with individual issues. However in this case it was felt that the denial of access to a long footpath (requiring people to walk along busy roads) was something the Forum should pursue, so we sought and received a full report on the reasons for the closure, presented in person to the Council's Forum by the Highways Solicitor. After discussion it was agreed that if further similar applications were submitted, more appropriate legislation would be considered, and the need to balance the rights of walkers against the operational needs of the landowners was recognised.

This issue was raised prior to the application by Donington Park to host the Formula One British Grand Prix from 2010 onwards. Planning permission has now been granted for the necessary enhancement of facilities to support this event and it is believed that the need for the protection of this footpath has been brought to the attention of all interested parties by the intervention of the Forum.

Roy Denney & Stan Warren



View of the Grand Union Canal at Kilby Bridge

River Soar & Grand Union Canal Strategy

The River Soar and Grand Union Canal corridor encompasses the Districts of Charnwood, Blaby, Oadby and Wigston, as well as running through the centre of the City of Leicester. The character of the route and its surroundings vary significantly throughout the corridor, with the waterway flowing through suburbs, industrial areas, city and town centres, villages and open countryside. The waterway provides an important link between the urban environments and rural Leicestershire, offering an element of green space as well as functioning as an access route between the different areas.

In November 2007 a national charity called The Waterways Trust, which works with others to promote greater public enjoyment of our inland waterways, was successful in a bid to the East Midlands Development Agency for a grant to carry out a study and produce a strategy for the river and canal from Kilby Bridge to Loughborough, covering a 23-mile waterway corridor.

A group of key stakeholders, including Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, relevant District Councils, British Waterways, the Environment Agency and Leicestershire Promotions met several times. Also represented is the Inland Waterways Association, a national charity that works with waterways bodies, national and local authorities, and voluntary, private and public sector organisations to promote the use, maintenance and protection of inland waterways.

The vision of the strategy is: *'Through partnership working and shared commitment to realise the full potential of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal to enhance the well-being of Leicestershire residents and visitors'*. An official public consultation period ended in January 2009, though

comments are still invited via a questionnaire on the project website at www.riversoarstrategy.com.

The Forum submitted comments during the consultation period, basically agreeing with the proposed set of 9 objectives as areas of focus for future work, although we encouraged greater emphasis on the Soar Valley as an asset of sub-regional importance and its contribution to the Strategic Green Infrastructure.

Further Forum comments highlighted a lack of information on how the emerging river/canal strategy ties in with other sub-regionally and regionally important projects and strategies such as Stepping Stones* and the National Forest. The Forum also recommended that there should be mention of Green Wedges and their significance in the area.

While supporting the strategy in principle, the boating community noted a concern that, in attempting to enhance the experience for some visitors, it will detract from the experience of others. In other words, the 'remoteness' of the waterway is often a significant factor in visitors' enjoyment.

The strategy quite rightly calls for a balance between the desire to increase access to the waterway and, importantly, the need to conserve and enhance its ecological and wildlife habitats value. It is worth noting that the presence of 'through boaters' and their satisfaction with a waterway can be regarded as an indicator for its health and vitality and hence its attractiveness to land-based visitors.

Herbert Eppel

** Stepping Stones is a partnership of District Councils and the County Council working in the area surrounding Leicester to improve greenspace and make high quality green infrastructure available to all.*

Rivers Access Campaign

'Rivers Access' www.riversaccess.org is a campaign funded by Canoe England to raise awareness of issues relating to access to inland waterways in England and Wales. A campaign representative gave a presentation at one of the regular Forum meetings, reporting that access to and along inland waters for non-powered craft is severely restricted.

The campaign calls for better access, which would provide millions of people (not just canoeists, but also anglers, walkers, boaters and other interest groups) with opportunities for recreation near their homes, with added benefits for public health, education, social cohesion and local economies.

Public access to land has been strengthened by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, but access to water was not included. The River Access Campaign acknowledges that inland waters are important habitats for flora and wildlife and that any new legislation should be supported by an Access

Code that would highlight environmental responsibilities for sustainable access to maintain and improve biodiversity.

Herbert Eppel



Aerial view of the improved access at Watermead Country Park

Forum meetings have also covered

County Council activities, plans and proposals

Meetings receive updates and comment on relevant County Council issues. Examples include:

- Connect2 (the project enhancing paths and cycleways around Watermead Country Park).
- Restructuring of the Environment and Heritage Branch (which includes the Countryside Service).
- Plans for the disposal of selected County Council Country Parks.
- The development of the Local and Multi Area Agreements for public services in Leicestershire.
- The County Council proposed policy on Gating Orders to restrict access to urban alleyways.
- Developing the involvement of local communities and volunteers with Rights of Way.
- Review of the Walking Festival and plans for a Walking Week in 2009.