

Roy J Denney Chair LLAF

Report on meeting of East Mids. LAF Chairs - 27.9.2011

We had a very full meeting, out of which a number of issues arise.

The next meeting of the 'road users' forum is again scheduled to be at County Hall and is to be on Nov 25th. Notice of intent to attend is required by Oct 21st as are any agenda items.

One idea suggested at the meeting is a project which is being started by one of the Lincolnshire LAFs and is to try and get each parish council to appoint a footpaths 'Tsar' as a point of contact between the parishes and the rights of way team and the LAF. This sounds a good idea if we can get them to run with it and is in line with suggestions John Law has made in the past.

The consultation is running on the new Planning Framework. I am shortly to receive a media summary of the proposals which might make this easier to grasp and it could be circulated to the members for comment. They can each be asked to make comment direct but if the LAF is to comment it will be down to presumably me to collate any views and agree something with you to go in from us as our next meeting is after close for comment.

I did report on what we had been up to in the last 6 months and they have asked for a summary of the Bardon Hill consultation and the Recreational Use of Quarries Seminar which they can circulate as good practice. I will have a go at doing these and run them by you for your input before sending them on.

The LAF annual report is to be in an entirely new format and I should receive the standard form shortly. We can still do our 'sexy' report for public consumption but are required to do a report in the new way.

It will include a list of our successes which I feel is unfortunate as many of our impacts are ongoing with no specific outcome. We can however write in some form of summary of Bardon Hill, the HLSS and the Quarries seminar for example. It seems we will have to start setting ourselves aims and ambitions and a forward work programme so that we can measure success against it.

We did discuss Definitive Map problems and I flagged up LCC stats of known anomalies. One good idea which was floated by Chris Padley, Chair of Mid Lincolnshire LAF, is one that I would like us to discuss and possibly put forward both to Defra and to our own elected masters. All authorities are short staffed and the legal people doing modification orders are also carrying out numerous other functions. It is suggested that many cases have fairly obvious solutions and the great weight of these could be farmed out to a central office where a team of legal experts doing nothing else but, could deal with lots of these cases for numerous authorities and do them more quickly and for a less cost.

The new team of Natural England introduced themselves to us including Steve Roberts who is to be our contact in future. It was also confirmed that the appointment of Fiona Groves as our co-ordinator was only short term during transition to a new way of working.

There is to be an entirely new way of communicating and I will need time to explain it to members at our next meeting and demonstrate it to other members as far as I can. That will depend as to whether I have been fully trained by then. For starters there is a 20 mins video. Basically it is in response to the consultation by the Minister (Benyon) as to how to proceed after the demise of the unlamented English Access Forum.

They are introducing an online network which sounds good but we were the first to be told of the system and raised a few concerns which are to be looked into. Known as Huddle it should save time and cost by reducing meetings and correspondence. Huddle is an online network that allows users to connect, share and work together easily.

It is already used by a wide variety of organisations and a workspace has been created on it specifically for LAFs where we can upload useful documents, start discussions with other LAFs, share information and best practice ideas and it allows us to work with others when a face to face meeting is not possible. We can make links with other LAFs that may have similar interests and priorities to ours but are the other side of the country! We can also send notes to Natural England, Defra or indeed the Minister as Richard Benyon has committed to hosting discussion events through Huddle so we can put your questions directly to him.

If we need a bit of extra support with a tricky response we can ask a LAF which has dealt with a similar issue, to support us indeed one of the LAFs today who had not had time to deal with it has asked to see our response to the Village Greens consultation.

It will also help us to keep up to date with new advice, guidance, legislation and it can form an online central library of specialised information. By accessing this information LAFs can save time by not reinventing the wheel – where we have a problem or situation, we can search for documents and read how other people have tackled a similar issue.

Huddle is absolutely free for LAFs to use, there will be no cost incurred to LAFs or local authorities for its use. Training will be provided by regional coordinators and ongoing support will be available from Natural England.