

# **DOWN OUR WAY**

**NEWSLETTER OF THE LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM  
TELEPHONE - 0116 265 7086 - FOOTPATHS@LEICS.GOV.UK**

**THE FORUM MEETS EVERY TWO MONTHS, NORMALLY IN COUNTY HALL. MEETINGS ARE OCCASIONALLY MOVED AROUND THE COUNTY TO GIVE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC A CHANCE TO ATTEND NEAR TO THEIR HOMES.**

**THE TWENTY ONE MEMBERS ARE DRAWN FROM MANY AND VARIED WALKS OF LIFE AND FROM RIGHT ACROSS THE COUNTY AREA AND INCLUDE EXPERTS IN MANY DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF USING THE RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK (FOOTPATHS, BRIDLEWAYS AND CYCLE WAYS) AND THE OPEN AREAS OF OUR COUNTY.**

**WE ADVISE THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND HIGHWAYS AGENCY ON FUTURE PLANS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN ACCESS. WE ALSO ADVISE ON THEIR MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR THE COUNTRY PARKS.**

**FORUM MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND FUTURE DATES, TIMES AND VENUES ARE LISTED IN OUR WEB SITE. [WWW.LEICS.GOV.UK/LAF](http://WWW.LEICS.GOV.UK/LAF)**

**TOP PRIORITY AT PRESENT IS TO ASSIST THE COUNTY COUNCIL WITH THEIR AMBITIOUS RIGHTS-OF -WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN WHICH IS OUT FOR CONSULTATION AT THE PRESENT TIME**

How  
can  
you  
Help?

**THERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC CAN ASSIST AND IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU MAKE YOUR VIEWS KNOWN AND HELP SHAPE THE ENVIRONMENT WE WILL ALL SHARE IN THE FUTURE.**

**ROY DENNEY, CHAIRMAN SINCE THE FORUM WAS SET UP IN AUGUST 2003 REFLECTS THE VIEWS OF THE MEMBERS WHEN HE SAYS IT IS TIME TO GET DOWN TO SPECIFICS.**

The Forum has been developing over the early years and growing into its role.

Amongst our basic aims is to promote a better balance between the needs of outdoor sport and recreational pursuits and those of nature conservation in the countryside, whilst giving due consideration to the concerns of those living and working within the areas.

We are tasked with helping to encourage use of the countryside for leisure and health and to assist in educating the public as to how to understand and enjoy it and how to conduct themselves when out there.



If we are to give 'reasoned' advice to various bodies and agencies we must listen to all points of view and be prepared to compromise our own views to achieve that balance. To this end we are currently consulting with numerous local organisations.

We have discussed and made contributions to numerous formal consultations but now need to become more proactive and publicise our role to solicit information from members of the public and other bodies.

Our primary focus during the first years was the introduction of the new provisions of Open Access. The Countryside Agency carried out wide scale consultations to assess

those areas that should be included but Leicestershire is not blessed with many areas of 'mountain, moor, heath or down'. This however, did not prevent a lively debate regarding the sites that should be included but the end result has not added a great deal to our provision. We do however have a large part of the growing National Forest within our County.

We are now turning our attention to the production of a Rights Of Way Improvement Plan for the county and are considering the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public. We have contributed to the draft plan now the subject of public consultation and whilst you can respond directly to the consultation questionnaire being circulated by the county council you are also invited to send in any views or opinions to the forum who will try and represent the views of the populous at large.

Consultants have been appointed by the Countryside Agency to do archive research for the Discovering Lost Ways Project and they are trawling records for any indication of any old route of whatever sort. The information is then being passed to the Countryside Agency and the Local Authority.

They do not directly seek material from volunteers but both they and the Countryside Agency are keen that volunteers and user groups should cull secondary sources and local records and the Forum can be a conduit for channeling any further information to the Rights of Way team.

The consultants are looking primarily to the National Archives at Kew and the County Archives but much material out in the country has not reached either of those locations.

It is important for us to find out about local conditions, needs and usage patterns and that is very much part of our brief.

This therefore is where you can certainly help. Can you identify any pockets of open countryside where access is permitted but a route in is difficult?

Is there any link between communities which you do not feel is adequately provided for at present? Are you aware of any factors deterring people from enjoying any facility? Do you feel that present rights of way are being maintained adequately? Are you aware of any rights of way which could be upgraded to accommodate more classes of user?

If you have any suggestions or want any further information please contact us or send in your observations.



Two people are currently being sought to fill vacancies on the forum (for a period of up to three years). Applications are invited from anyone who has a positive interest in countryside access and can actively represent ethnic minorities. In addition a further member is required who has a particular knowledge of nature conservation.

All existing members will shortly be required to offer themselves for re-election and anyone else interested is invited to apply to be a member provided only that they are representative of users of the new rights of access and/or users of local rights of way; are owners and/or occupiers of access land or land crossed by local rights of way; and represent a field of interest rather than particular organisations of which they might also be a member.



There is a wide cross section of interests represented on the present forum which it is intended should be an independent voice representing the views of user groups and members of the general public.

Amongst those represented are; equestrian interests, cycling, orienteering, running, walking, the environment and wildlife, tourism, health promotion, education, wheeled access, the interests of the disabled, rock climbing, kayaking and the interests of landowners and those working within the countryside.

Research and the exchange of ideas of good practice between the forum and those of other counties have been progressively refining how the forum can best operate and there is a current review of the regulations covering their activities.

Working parties and sub groups have now been set up and members will now start seeing some real impact from their input.

We are starting to work on the actual improvements to our rights of way network to make it easier for people to access the countryside in the first place.

Leicestershire is now being split up into manageable areas and work is starting on several of them this year. To assist us in our deliberations, we welcome any broad strategic ideas or points of concern and specific suggestions for improvements where missing links could be considered.

One of our aims as mentioned previously is to encourage those who do not normally visit the countryside to do so, and to this end, given the ethnic mix of our larger conurbations, it would be a benefit to have members of the ethnic minorities on the group.

Leicestershire has a wealth of wild life if you know how and where to find it and it is very much part of our role to help people not familiar with the countryside to learn how to access and enjoy it.



As an entirely independent advisory body, the Local Access Forum is not part of Local Government although we do work alongside it.

The regulations require the County Council to advertise the forum vacancies in local or

regional newspapers and on its web site but anyone can express an interest in joining.

The County Council is free to determine the details of its appointment procedures bearing in mind the need for fairness and transparency and compliance with its policy on social inclusion and diversity. In appointing members to the Forum, the County Council tries to take account of the needs of young people, women, people on low income, and representation from disabled people.

The minimum period of appointment to the forum is one year but members serve for up to three years and many of us are in our last year and if any other members of the community wish to be considered for positions when the situation is reviewed they should contact County Hall and make their interest known.

Meetings are currently held every two months; they revolve between day time meetings at County Hall and evening meetings at both the north and south ends of the county in an attempt to allow anyone interested to be able to participate.

Short of actually joining the forum members of the public are welcome to attend all our meetings and can raise any queries, preferable provided in advance.

Our next few meetings are;

- Wed 24th May 6.45pm County Hall
- Mon 31st Jul 6.45pm Park House, Glenfield
- Tue 12th Sept 1.30pm County Hall
- Thu 16th Nov 6.45pm Brocks Hill, Oadby
- Mon 29th Jan 6.45 Park House, Glenfield

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