

Speaking up - on Rights of Way and Countryside Access



Leicestershire Local Access Forum

2013 Update

Local Access Forums are independent advisory bodies that bring together the different interests concerned with public rights of way and countryside access, including farmers property owners, conservationists, local councils, and users such as walkers and riders.

During 2012-3 the Access Forum has ...

1. Pursued questions about specific issues of local concern

- **Melton Show** has previously illegally blocked public rights of way. The Forum has raised this and next year the paths will be temporarily closed by the proper process.
- **Byways temporary closures.** The Forum has queried the County Council about repeat closures for maintenance which did not occur. LCC is now reviewing how it manages byways and minor unsurfaced roads and the Forum will then scrutinise this strategy.
- **Countesthorpe new bridleway?** The Forum has taken an active interest in whether a bridleway could be included next to footpaths Z43 and Z44 in the planned country park.

2. Raised rights of way issues in major planning & development schemes

The Forum submits comments to the District Councils on major planning schemes and large development projects, and engages direct with the developers where possible.

- **Bardon New Quarry** – the first development phase now being implemented includes rights of way changes and some new routes originally proposed by the Forum.
- **Optimus Point, Glenfield** – discussions with developer Wilson Bowden have resulted in rights of way improvements being incorporated in the development proposals.

The Forum has also formally commented on:

- Blaby District Council's Open Spaces Policy and Local Development Framework;
- North West Leics District Council's Core Development Framework and Cycling Strategy;
- Charnwood Borough Council's Thurmaston Regeneration Strategy about Watermead.

3. Championed new public access and unprotected 'lost' rights of way

- **Unprotected and 'lost' historic rights of way** (these vanish in 2026 unless put on the Definitive Map). The Forum has set-up a sub-group to focus its own efforts on this and help avoid duplication of effort by other groups actively concerned about this issue.
- **Charnwood Forest: Past Ways - Lost Ways - New Ways** including researching ancient paths was a project proposal by the Forum. It formed part of the bid for lottery funds to create a Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership based on the Regional Park plans.
- **New public access on farmland** owned by Leicestershire County Council. As farm tenancies become due for renewal the Forum is advising on possible routes for new paths.
- **National Forest long distance trail** - The Forum has input ideas and given practical help.

- **End of Government grant-aided permissive paths** The Forum highlighted this in 2012 and has continued to encourage Parish Councils to ask relevant local farmers if this access could be retained, particularly in places where the access delivers real public benefits.

4. Monitored County Council work on public rights of way and access

- **Proposed path diversions and revisions** The Forum scrutinises quarterly updates about Definitive Map rights of way that are being legally diverted, deleted or added.
- **Reviewing paths across railway lines** The County Council and Network Rail project has been examined through briefings and Forum site visits to affected locations.

The Forum has also received and commented on report from the County Council about: Rights of Way Improvement Plan progress; Policy on installing Self-closing gates; Pathfinder – the County Council's project to identify and protect lost rights of way.

5. Engaged with other providers of countryside access opportunities

The Forum is actively interested in country parks and access provided by local authorities, charities and business – and in projects that encourage people to explore the countryside.

- **Bradgate Park Trust** The Forum had a briefing from the new Land Agent & Surveyor.
- **Beacon Hill Management Plan** was reviewed by the Forum who also had a site visit.
- **Duke of Edinburgh Awards** The Forum was given an overview of the Scheme.

6. Commented on national and local government about policy proposal

Responding to changing legislation and regulations is a key role. The Forum has commented to the relevant UK Government consultations about:

- **Highways stopping-up and diversion orders** as done by local authorities.
- **Changing the Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way**

The Forum has also responded to national consultations about the management of public woodlands and about improving health and well-being through physical exercise.

Looking ahead – priorities for 2014 include ...

... continuing the activities listed above. In addition to these the Forum will focus on ...

- **The impact of likely changes to local government & its funding** over the next 5 years.
- **Planned changes to rights of way law and the 2026 deadline** for saving 'lost' historic routes may mean local government need more staff in this area, at least in the short term.
- **Developing volunteering partnerships** – to allow more people to get involved in contributing practically towards progressing rights of way and access issues.
- **Engaging other bodies with similar agendas** – including sending Forum representatives.

For more information ...

www.leicslaf.org.uk the site includes meeting dates, past papers, and a list of members.

information@leicslaf.org.uk

0116 305 7086

Leicestershire Local Access Forum, c/o TCAT, Room 700, County Hall, Glenfield, LE3 8RJ

The Forum is independent although the County Council provides administrative support.

LAF effectiveness: raising profiles & recruiting members

Workshop at LAF National Conference - Bristol – 4th February 2013.

Case Study: Promotion of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum

Leicestershire County Council has undertaken 3 distinct strands of Forum promotion
Copies of items mentioned below are available to view (or to adapt and re-use!) via either:

- The original recruitment web page on the web at: www.leicslaf.org.uk/lafapply
- Annual Reports, news releases, and meeting papers at: www.leicslaf.org.uk/papers
- Word files are on **Huddle** in the folder Files > Documents > LAF Recruitment >

1. Publicity Campaign – a general emphasis on profile raising has included:

- Most papers for main Forum meetings are included on the web site since 2007
- A Forum introductory leaflet, A4 poster and pull-up banner produced in 2008.
- Display of Forum banner/leaflet and local walks leaflets in public libraries in 2008.
- A Forum-hosted day conference for district councils, parishes, user groups etc. in 2008.
- Forum Annual Reports in a short fold-out newsletter format in both 2009 and 2010.

These things all went well, but it is unclear how much the Forum profile was raised. Many leaflets/newsletters were distributed. A wide spectrum of 80 people (plus Forum members & LCC staff) attended the conference, but it was resource-intensive to organise and run.

2. Publicising Forum Key Issues – only a small initiative but a useful model for others?

Two combined press release & briefing documents were issued to local media, community publications, district councils, parish councils, user groups & other relevant organisations.

The end of Defra funded permissive access - April 2012 - about HLS agri-environment scheme changes, promoting use while it lasts, and urging parish councils to encourage farmers to retain the access – view at: www.leics.gov.uk/defrapermisiveaccess.pdf

Grants for new public paths to help rural areas & businesses - Dec 2012 – encouraging local interest in Paths for Communities grants – see www.leics.gov.uk/p4cscheme.pdf

Both releases concluded with a paragraph on Forum, but were time-consuming to prepare.

3. Recruitment Drive

Needing 5 new Forum members justified a more concerted effort, which involved:

- Producing an Applicants' Pack, including Role Description and Person Specification.
- Devising a Press Release on what the Local Access Forum is, and why apply to join it.
- Compiling distribution lists for the release, an email alert, or printed packs and publicity.
- Devising a process for handling applications and holding candidate interviews.

The campaign produced wide coverage in local print media and on local news websites, 2 radio interviews, 11 varied enquiries, and 17 applications, mostly from suitable candidates.

The package either emailed or posted consisted of: covering letter; applicants' pack and application form; Forum introductory leaflet; Forum newsletter-style annual report. Parish Councils were also sent a laminated Forum A4 poster to display on their noticeboard.

Key elements

The good response to the recruitment campaign was helped by:

- a. Making clear what the Forum involves - and what is expected of members.
 - **Package it like a 'job'**, conveyed the message this is a significant volunteer role.
- b. Focusing on the potential applicants and what things might attract their interest.
 - **Highlight benefits rather than features** in the press release etc. Tell people what Forum involvement will do for them – what do they gain by becoming a member?
 - **Avoid jargon or abbreviations**. Make clear what 'access' means in this context.

e.g. our headline was *Help shape countryside and urban access in Leicestershire*
which is better than *LAF seeks new applicants to discuss access issues*
- c. Widespread but well-targeted distribution of the information, or actual printed packs.
 - **Use existing channels** if possible, e.g. the Council press office, job and volunteering adverts, Schools links (re Outdoor Education), via consultative Community Forums, to Heritage Wardens, Black & Ethnic Organisation contacts, via the Association of Parish Councils, and via a rural business and communities partnership network.
 - **Compile listings** for parish/community newsletters and stakeholder groups. Include:
 - Main groups e.g. U3A Local branches/walk groups, Ramblers, CHA Ramblers; local groups for walking, horse-riding, cycling, orienteering, climbing, running;
 - Local contacts of national bodies BHS, OSS, CTC, NFU, CLA, BTCV, CPRE; Other bodies with no local contacts e.g. Auto Cycle Uni, British Driving Soc, Endurance GB, Fieldfare Trust, Green Lane Assn, Land Access & Rec Assn, Trail Riders' Fellowship;
 - Green groups e.g. YHA, local wildlife trust, Woodland Trust, BASC, Groundwork;
 - Community bodies e.g. WI, disability groups, local history groups, youth organisations, also Duke of Edinburgh local co-ordinators and expedition panels.
- d. Tailoring the format and distribution channel to the specific audience
 - **Customise the covering letter** e.g. to Parish Councils, Black/Ethnic Organisations.
 - **Email where possible** so people can easily forward messages, as well saving costs.
 - **Don't send attachments** to clog inboxes - include items on the web and send links.
 - **Post as well, if printed copies will get more attention** – print is more likely to be seen and circulated in some contexts e.g. to hand round at Parish Council meetings.

On reflection

- a. **Allow enough time** - so people can observe a Forum main meeting before applying..
- b. **Seek coverage in any Council newspaper** – we didn't as scope / timescale didn't fit.
- c. **Remember the Council is the appointing authority** - recruitment is it's responsibility. But Forum members can help e.g. compiling distribution lists, spreading the word etc.

Website advertising

Template for schools and external organisations (we aim to process your request within 48 hours of receipt of this form, however, there may be exceptions to this dependant on workloads)

Job details

Job Title	Member of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum
Name of Organisation	Leicestershire County Council
Location	Glenfield, Leicester
Salary/Payscale	Unpaid voluntary positions
Job Reference Number	N/A
Closing Date	16th January 2012
Advert details	
<p>Contract details: Unpaid voluntary positions Hours: 4 evenings per year, plus other occasional workshops Job Category: Other Advert text: (50 words max)</p> <p>Interested in walking and riding in the countryside? Apply to join the Access Forum. Unpaid volunteers - representing community groups, farmers and land managers, and users like walkers and riders - meet quarterly to debate topical issues, discuss policy proposals, and raise concerns all related to rights of way and access land.</p> <p>Informal enquiries/application details:</p> <p>For an Information Pack, visit: www.leics.gov.uk/lafapply email: accessforum@leics.gov.uk or phone 0116 305 7655 either to request a pack or for an informal discussion about these positions. Closing Date: 16th January 2012. Informal interviews by arrangement.</p>	

Please complete this form and return by email to escruitment2@leics.gov.uk or post to Recruitment Team, Employee Service Centre, Leicestershire County Council, Eastern Annexe, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester, LE3 8SR

For external organisations and schools that do not buy into HR services, there will be a £100 charge for this advert (please provide details for invoice purposes, ie: name/address)