



**Report on the
LAF Guidance Workshop
Bristol
8 February 2006**



1. Summary

On 8 February Defra and the Countryside Agency hosted a workshop bringing together 17 local access forum members from across England. The workshop looked at how written guidance, issued by Defra and the Agency, could be improved and developed in a way which best meets the needs of forums and forum members as far as possible.

Better guidance and information will help to achieve the Minister's vision for local access forums, which is "*to see forums regarded by decision-makers as a valued source of independent, incisive, informed and influential advice on access and open-air recreation issue*". It was recognised that achieving the vision depends on more than written guidance, but clear and concise information is an important foundation.

Many constructive ideas and interesting suggestions emerged during the day. This report summarises the issues which were raised by workshop participants. Some of the key themes to emerge were:-

- the importance of providing clarification on the roles of all those involved with forums (especially appointing authorities Chairmen, members and secretaries);
- the vital importance of getting the relationship right between the access authority and the forum (and the challenges which this can create);
- the need for better information on key policies areas;
- easier access to contact details (so that people can contact the forum secretaries and also so that forums can contact the section 94(4) bodies); and
- the need to ensure that all written material is relevant, focused and uses plain English.

The issues raised will be taken into account in revising the Secretary of State's Guidance and producing a new LAF Members Information Pack/Handbook.

Many of the issues will need careful consideration to ensure that written guidance issued by Defra or the Countryside Agency strikes the correct balance and is consistent with the legalisation and other requirements. Some of the issues raised are beyond the remit of the written guidance but will be taken into account in other ways as appropriate.

2. Attendance

Forum members: Hazel Armstrong (East Riding & Hull), Philip Barton (Merseyside), Caroline Bedell (Shropshire), John Cutler (Northamptonshire), John Disney (Derby), Duncan Graham (Cumbria), John Griffin (Oxfordshire), John Hall (Warwickshire), Bob Harvey (Devon), Carolyn James (Nottinghamshire), Mike Johnson (Wiltshire), Allan Jones (Norfolk), David Judson (Herefordshire), Andrew McCloy (Peak District), Lindsay Perks (Tyne & Wear), Cosima Towneley (Lancashire), Geoff Wilson (Yorkshire Dales).

Defra: Heliose Tierney, Geoff Audcent, David Trott, Bev Cavender, Kim Gunningham.

Countryside Agency: David Gear, Andy Green.

ANPA (Association of National Park Authorities): Rachel Mozley.

LGA (Local Government Association): Trevor Mose.

Workshop Facilitator: Steve Jenkinson.

3.1 Discussion on key issues for the revised LAF Guidance and Information Pack

3.1 On the Role of Local Access Forums:

- √√ Define statutory function of local access forums
- √√ Proactively advising
- √√ Define bodies to whom local access forums give advice - section 94(4) bodies
- √ Clarify the status of advice given by local access forums
- √ Influencing decision-makers
- √ Focusing on strategic issues, dealing with site-specific issues
- √ Measuring effectiveness

3.2 Working Arrangements

- √√ Obtaining feedback from decision-making bodies
- √√ Annual report – what should it contain

- √√ Finance – Transparency
- √√ /x Annual Work Programme (mixed views expressed on value !)
- √√ Resources for forum work
- √√ Meeting structure/organisation
- √√ Training
- √ Observers
- √ Sub-groups and site visits
- √ Public access to meetings and documents
- √ Business between meetings
- √ Promotion and awareness raising
- √ Networking and Regional liaison and cross boundary working

3.3 Roles and responsibilities

- √√ Define the role of everyone involved with forums, but especially:-
 - Appointing Authorities
 - LAF Chairs
 - LAF members

3.4 Guidance for appointing authorities

- √√ Supporting your forum
- √√ Making the most of your forum
- √√ Joint arrangements

3.5 Subject Specific Guidance

- √√ √ Implementation of ROWIPs
- √√ √ Planning policies and planning applications – road schemes, development proposals and Local Development Frameworks, District councils
- √√ √ Less detail on CROW Open Access – more strategic
- √√ Disability access – urban and rural
- √√ Environment Agency and access to water
- √ Centralised list of forum contact and/or vacancies

3.6 Other issues

- √ local authority finance and performance indicators
- √ Maintaining motivation and enthusiasm
- √ LTPs
- √ Heath and sport
- √ How to identify landowners
- √ Protected landscapes
- √ Woodland
- √ EA - Water
- √ NCAF

4. Discussion - “Issues I wish I’d known before joining a LAF”:-

- Local authorities provide poor coffee !
- There should have been more dentists sitting on forums ! (.....as they are toothless)
- How interesting it is - how much I would learn about other people and interests
- How hard it would be to explain to other people what a LAF is and does
- The amount of appointing authority interference
- All the jargon
- How 'sensitive' local authorities officers can be
- How challenging/difficult it would be to understand the issues
- Lack to 'welcome' information or induction

5. Discussion on some of the key issues

5.1 What should the written guidance say about getting the work done: such as proactive-v-reactive, strategic-v-specific ?

- LAFs must be proactive (as well as reactive)
- Being proactive requires forward planning
- LAFs should receive feedback on its advice within a reasonable (or specified) time
- Guidance on standards for responses and acknowledgments(what LAFs can expect)
- Guidance on role of LAF when it receives requests for 'mediation' or 'intervention' from the public
- LAFs to provide a common-sense view as advice
- Give clear advice, which may not always represent a single consensus view
- Need to explain/assert LAF role as a statutory adviser/consultee to section 94(4) bodies
- Be clear that good quality LAF advice will add value rather than be a burden
- LAFs should advise on strategy but be able to comment on specific cases
- LAFs need to draw on specific experience to justify advice on particular issues
- Role of LAF in bringing people together
- Guidance on scope for individuals to represent the LAF, and for giving advice which represents the view of the entire LAF
- Need local authorities to inform LAFs of new strategies and developments
- Desire to increase the number of bodies who have to consult LAF
- LAFs need to be independent of appointing authorities
- Be careful about precedents
- Clarify whether LAF can seek external funding/resources to support its work

5.2 What should the written guidance say about helping LAFs to be more influential ?

- Link LAFs with the Countryside Code. Countryside Agency to explore use of Creature Comforts animations in producing LAF publicity material.
- Defra to be more influential with appointing authorities
- All departments within appointing authority to consult LAF (tourism, planning, highways, recreation)

- LAF members to be told what is expected of them
- More awareness of how local government works
- Must be seen to be independent - recognise not elected members
- Hold section 94(4) bodies to account in 'having regard' to advise given
- Powers to push through footpath creation orders
- Raise public profile of LAFs (press release, posters in libraries, websites, articles in free papers or local authorities newspapers) – national and local
- Guidance notes needed on key issues from Defra and Countryside Agency
- Training – issues/media awareness, national
- Appointing authorities to promote and explain role of LAFs in meetings with other bodies, and how LAFs can help
- Provide LAF contact details on web
- A national conference.
- Each LAF to be given contact details for all the section 94(4) bodies in its area.
- There was board consensus that it would be useful for the Guidance (and Regulations if necessary) to clarify the situation with regard to forums giving advice on functional or utility access and use of rights of way (eg for access to shops, employment, amenities) in addition to recreational access, it was felt that functional or utility was an important consideration, especially for urban areas, which LAFs should be able to advise on when necessary.

5.3 What should the written guidance say about how LAF Chairmen and Members carry out their role ?

- Conduct of meetings
- Understanding the limitations/constraints of LAFs
- Relationship with appointing authority
- Importance of elected members attending meetings
- Continuity of membership/rotation
- Work between meetings
- Representing the LAF to outside bodies or at meetings/events
- Training, in-house training and good practice
- A 'skeleton' induction pack (with room for local inserts)
- Role of Chairman and Sub-groups
- Role of secretary – should be a lynch pin
- Complaints procedure (between members and authorities)
- Make up and balance of LAF
- LAF members should be made aware of the need to look at issues impartially
- Chairmen need leadership skills, and be impartiality, enthusiastic, respected, etc.
- Selection procedure
- Meetings to be flexible and to allow for urgent business to be discussed
- Member allowances, reasonable costs, compensation for lost earnings
- Seek inclusiveness and constructive consensus, but reflect minority views in giving advice
- Allow for public involvement and consultation
- Importance of appointing authority providing an effective and properly resourced secretariat

- Have a LAF letterhead and logo

5.4 What should the written guidance say about how appointing authorities support and resource their LAF ?

- Access authorities, members and officers, should actively consider how the LAF might help them doing their work
- Appointing authorities should recognise the independence of LAF advice (and the value of having an independent source of advice)
- Lines of communication within (and, for joint LAFs, between) appointing authorities
- Finance - what budget is available and what can it be spent on
- Ring fenced funding and/or more funding, for LAFs from Central Government
- How can local authority budgets be influenced – and pre-influenced – timing critical
- Access authorities to seek LAF advice on budget spend and grant funding opportunities/applications
- Access authorities to understand how LAF works (or doesn't work)
- Access authorities to provide a source of profession expertise to LAFs
- Access Authorities to adopt an inclusive approach towards LAF, and backup
- Accessible venues and meeting times
- Open and transport relations and information exchange between access authorities and LAF
- Provision of a web page on the council website, PR support, involve LAF members at county shows, council workshops, article in council newsletters
- Cost of officer time should be built into LAF support
- Elected members to attend all meetings
- LAF 'hot line' to Defra
- Apply 'critical path' analysis to decision making or LAF achieving aims

6. Discussion on production, presentation, and promotion on design

6.1 How best should the information pack and guidance notes be produced (i.e. formats, media types, etc) ?

- Involve/consult LAFs, consult widely on the draft
- Integrate guidance notes for LAFs and AAs in one document
- If separate documents needed, carefully cross-reference and date them
- Consider an executive summary (for the Guidance)
- Consider using 'margin notes' (for the Guidance)
- Depending on format, leave space for AAs to add relevant local information, to complement national/generic information
- Make material available on a web site, with links to individual LAFs
- If the material is on a web site, include a 'chat-room'/forum to discuss
- Include examples/issues
- Use a plastic-covered, robust, ring-file binder, facilitating the easy addition/replacement of pages (for updating)
- Ensure format is such that LAF chairs may use it as a LAF 'Bible'.

- Make hard copies of docs available electronically on a web site, but not on a CD ROM (difficulty of updating)
- If a CD ROM is adopted, incorporate a CD ROM pocket in the binder cover

6.2 How best should the information pack and guidance notes be presented? (ie design/structure/style)

- Use common logo on all items/communications
- Date all items
- In addition to a contents page, an index would be a bonus
- Incorporate a 'jargon' buster and/or glossary of terms and/or list of abbreviations
- Use clear black type, definitely not colour on colour (to enable easier photocopying)
- Use plain/straightforward English
- Give careful consideration to font style and size (12pt minimum)
- Arial or Verdana fonts are recommended
- Consider layout carefully, and include tables, diagrams, and photos
- Include summaries and best practices, especially located in 'out-take' boxes
- Consider use of illustrations/humour (cartoons?) to help break-up text
- Employ comprehensive footnotes, so text can be more concise
- Use 'punchy' headline-style titles

6.3 How best should the the information pack and guidance notes be promoted? (ie awareness/interest raising)

- Evolve a nationally recognisable logo for LAFs
- Contact BBC and other media to arrange national/local publicity, eg the Archers, Countryfile
- Get articles in user group magazines
- Link with health-sector publications
- Consider agricultural shows as an outlet
- Ask OS to refer to LAFs on back of maps or insert a separate leaflet in Explorer Maps
- Link with Aardman characters used in recent Countryside Code campaign
- Refer to material on library/village hall/parish notice boards, and in TICs.
- Ensure related organisations (allies) publicise material
- Refer to in web site 'update' sections
- Make available in ethnic minority languages
- Ensure all parish councils have copies
- Make available in Braille (format available from RNIB)
- 'Cross-publicise' in other LA publications
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7. The “Issues Park” :-

- Why 2 documents ?
- A simple and glossy LAF promotional leaflet required
- Slant of Guidance
- There must a statutory obligation of authorities to implement ROWIPs
- Local authorities budget pressures should be recognised
- Performance indicators = Funding !
- Can a LAF Secretary be appointing by anyone other than an appointing authority ?
- Where a LAF was established after the publication of the Draft Maps, does this create a responsibility to reopen consultation on Open access with the established LAF ?
- Communication vital between Defra, CA and LAF Chairs
- Status of LAFs - Better to think in terms of 'partnership' with the access authority, rather than just 'advisers'
- LAF website needed - part public , part for LAF members, part for other bodies, each with a 'chat-room'
- Need to be clear under what circumstances meetings need to be 'secret' (e.g. because of sensitive or vulnerable nature conservation interests).
- Connect NCAF with each and every LAF, perhaps via a regional structure
- Information needed on future role of NCAF ?

8. Participants' Feedback after the Workshop

[.....Any Contributions ?]