

Local Access Forum
Meeting of the 'Improving Rights' Subcommittee
Thursday 17th April 2008

Present: Tony Turner, Eric Broadbent, Edward Dennison, John Taylor, David Swabey, Paul Tibbatts and Rachel Connolly

Unable to attend: Diane Baines, David Gibson, Alan Aspden, Paul Chapman,

In the absence of Alan Aspden, Eric Broadbent took the meeting; Rachel Connolly note-taker

Tony Turner reminded the group that the new Director of Environment will hopefully be attending the next full LAF meeting. It was important to engage him in the aims of the group and the difficulties of implementation due to financial and staffing cuts in the rights of way department. In the meantime, would it be possible to achieve some 'quick wins' to demonstrate the improvements we sought, for example, by installing a couple of accessible gates in place of stiles on a route recently promoted in the NY Times.

Diane had previously suggested that an **Education Toolkit**, aimed at Primary School level, would be invaluable and could be combined with other curricula activities. A local right of way could be the object for measuring, discussing the safety of the route, sustainability, usefulness and how it fitted in to past and present communication. This sort of initiative would need to have the backing of the County Education Department, and Tony Turner said he had contacts. Liaison with the County Cycling Officer who could be used to spread the message about using rights of way responsibly and the ethos of sharing safe space,

David Swabey asked what precisely would the LAF aim for. Would it be a mini-pack for each school, and how could this be delivered effectively and what time-frame was in mind. The idea was enthusiastically received and members would make suggestions before the next meeting which Tony Turner would collate as a start.

The Croft site visit was brought up. The group had agreed that it was in favour of '**package deals**' in principle as a sensible way forward, but John Taylor asked whether the LAF expected all such deals in future to come by the LAF for approval. It was thought that probably it would be better for the department together with the user consultees to work on future packages, otherwise it could consume the work of the LAF and possibly delay progress as the LAF didn't meet very frequently. However, it was important the core principles within the RoWIP were reflected in such packages.

The question of **Parish Council involvement** was raised by Tony Turner who had gone to much trouble to prepare some information from other authorities and

some notes on possible engagement. Whilst some Parish Councils, such as in the Dales, might welcome the extra involvement in order to promote routes and benefit from visitor income, other parishes may not be interested and could even be against way marking in case it generated extra use. There was likely to be a wide variety of response, partly on how it was 'sold'. Rachel Connolly asked if there was any mileage in the idea of **sponsorship**, as in some countries groups such as schools or sports clubs sponsored a stretch of route and had a pride in it. John Taylor had experience of selling advertising space in public places and it was an idea that could be explored further.

The question was asked – **Why are Rights of Way not available on the web?**. We would inquire whether it was the lack of initiative of local authorities or whether the OS prohibited it.

Edward Dennison said that the **Countryside Stewardship** scheme would end in 2011, and that not many farmers would reach the higher level because the goal posts were being moved and requirements raised. Currently farmers get 15p/metre for a permissive footpath, more for a bridleway or one accessible to the disabled, and some might be persuaded to make some of these paths permanent, or diverted to convenient routes if there was no expense involved. Normally a landowner has to pay the expense of advertising etc. when a diversion is made. It was suggested that the other LAFs in NYCC might be consulted to see if they agreed to a joint letter being sent to Defra to offset these necessary costs when the schemes finished, otherwise it would be an added cost for each local authority all in one shortish period. It would be a huge pity to lose the benefit of possibly permanent access for the sake of the departmental funds being unable to respond. This idea was to be taken to the full LAF and the Dales and the Moors contacted for their input.

As the Definite Rights of Way meeting was cancelled – it was agreed that it could meet when necessary and be combined with the Appeals and Notifications Subcommittee – Rachel Connolly reported on two matters:

The **Discovering Lost Ways** project had been abandoned by Natural England as it was deemed to be potentially too costly and would generate too many public enquiries. The effect would be felt by riders and carriage drivers in particular. Defra was strapped for cash after numerous disasters, and it was plain access took a very low priority. It was likely that funds for public access would be curtailed in all sorts of ways, with the local authorities expected to manage improvements and statutory duties on trimmed budgets.

She had noticed that during Phil Strand presentation at the last LAF he had mentioned with some satisfaction for some permissive footpaths in connection with the Nosterfield and Thornborough gravel works. It was agreed unanimously that when a permanent public minus due to planning development (industrial/housing estates/ quarrying etc.) be made, then a **planning gain** in the form of enhanced rights of way should be sought. However, these must be definitive rights so there was an equally permanent plus for the public, not merely

a permissive one which could be terminated at any time. Also, within the principles of the RoWIP it should be at the highest level possible which fitted with the circumstances. A letter would be drafted ready for the next LAF to be sent to District Councils and the Minerals Department of NYCC to highlight this issue.

It was suggested that the LAF ask for a report on the intention of the RoW department to list the RT roads. This issue seems to fall between Doug Huzzard and the definitive map.

As there was no other business, Eric Broadbent brought the meeting to a close.

Exploring your local Rights of Way

A Primary School Resource Pack

Find out about local Footpaths, Bridleways, Cycleways, and other types of local highways

Rights of way can be in or near to towns or in remote countryside. They can be wide tracks or narrow trails but all public rights of way are highways in law.

Anyone may use a right of way, and may do so at any time, just as they would any other kind of highway.

It is important to learn:

- what rights of way are available near you;
- how can you recognise them;
- how these routes should be used;
- who is responsible for looking after them;
- how to use paths and cycle ways safely.

These routes can often be improved or extended. Your suggestions would be helpful.

In this pack are a number of projects that you can undertake to find out what routes are available near your school. They include:

- simple map-reading;
- identifying signs and waymarkers – and suggesting extra local signs;
- measuring and plotting results;
- walking and cycling;
- planning routes for friends, families, cycle groups, & horse riders;
- learning a little about highways law;
- surveying routes that might be suitable for pushchair or wheelchair users;
- And even adopting a right of way!

England has about 190,000 km (118,000 miles) of footpaths, bridleways, and other rights of way. They are the most important way for visitors to enjoy the countryside, and are also useful for local people to get to the shops, school and work.



Footpath -

open to walkers only, waymarked with a yellow arrow



Bridleway -

open to cyclists, horseriders and walkers, waymarked with a blue arrow



Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) -

open to all walkers, cyclists, riders and motor vehicles, waymarked with a red arrow

Improving Access to the Rights of Way Network

Opportunities for Parish Councils

Your local rights of way network

1. Identifying the resources you have
2. How much use of the network is there?
3. Are your byways used appropriately?
4. Are routes easily accessible to wheelchairs and pushchairs?
5. Are there simple improvements that could be made?
6. Could any additional byways enhance your community?

Suggested Action: Recruiting community members to carry out a physical audit to walk, cycle, or ride the routes.

Maintaining Rights of Way

1. The responsibilities of NYCC.
2. The responsibilities of the Parish Council

Suggested Action: As part of the physical audit of local rights of way, assess their condition using the tool provided.

Opportunities to Improve or Develop

1. Identifying developments
2. How to fund developments

Suggested Action: Bring forward suggestions to the Parish Council to:

1. Develop and improve local rights of way in consultation with farmers and landowners to upgrade and re-open paths by undertaking practical work such as vegetation clearance, repairing stiles and waymarking, and replacing inaccessible stiles for wheelchair and pushchair users.
2. Organising events – often in partnership with groups of walkers, riders or cyclists – to promote the safe and appropriate use of byways,
3. Produce information for the community about who can do what on which local rights of way. This especially relates to any illegal use of byways by, for example, motorised vehicles, or horse riding/ cycling on footpaths.
4. Develop guidelines for young people who will be riding bikes or horses on local byways, ensuring that they are fully aware of their responsibilities.
5. Linked to all of the above points – agree a publicity and promotion strategy for parish paths.

Problem solving

1. How do local residents report problems?
2. Who will help with problems on local rights of way?
3. Establishing a local path volunteer warden to monitor the use of public paths and liaise with all parties over any problems that may arise.

Suggested Action:

1. Highways Authority and National Parks to provide information to parish council members and contact details for noticeboards.
2. ROW department support the establishment of Parish footpath wardens / caretakers.
3. Parishes bring forward suggestions for improvements, and how they might be funded.