

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.