

North Yorkshire Local Access Forum**12 July 2017****National Conference****Report of the Secretary****1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To provide feedback from the LAF national Conference held on 21 June 2017 in Birmingham.

2.0 Local Access Forum annual conference

- 2.1 The annual LAF conference took place at Carr's Lane Church, Birmingham, on 21 June 2017. Paul Sherwood attended the conference on behalf of the North Yorkshire LAF. His report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 There has also been some correspondence from the Regional Access Forum following the conference. This is attached at Appendix 2.

3.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 That the Forum considers the feedback from the annual national LAF conference.

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Report author: Kate Arscott, Secretary to North Yorkshire Local Access Forum

Background Documents: None

L.A.F. National Conference, Birmingham - 21st June 2017

Brief Report

The 2017 annual conference, held at the Carrs Lane Centre in Birmingham had about 80 delegates, most of which were LAF members and associated organisations/bodies with several employees of local authorities. A fairly even mix of male and female delegates, mainly middle aged – if not elderly!

Due to the appalling venue this report is somewhat limited in quality of information. Fortunately, the centre was fairly close to Birmingham station and easy to get to, but unfortunately, the venue, a form of 'modern church' with no air conditioning on one of the hottest days of the year also had abysmal acoustics which did little other than enhance echo in the main hall. Likewise the smaller rooms for workshops had to have windows open for cooling which enhanced traffic noise from the adjacent main road. Most delegates were unable to hear any questions "from the floor" as there was no roving microphone. The visual aspect was little better than the audio, as most conferences are now 'powerpoint' based it would have been advantageous to have a large enough screen high enough above floor level for everybody to be able to see it. Allegedly this is the first LAF conference organised by Natural England that has charged delegates (£10) however, this was not reflected in the overall experience.

- Bruce Cutts a Senior Advisor at Natural England gave a fifteen minute update on Natural Englands current workload and asked for more engagement from LAF's on Open Access long term restrictions, currently running at 150 nationwide. Followed by a 'historic' background to and a fairly lengthy update on the progress (or lack of) the Deregulation Act, including reviews of definitive maps, it seems we are unlikely to hear much more on this topic until April 2018. Although he did point out that the Act can allow for an extension of time. Does this mean 'Brexit' overshadows the dreaded cut-off date?

A lot of information on the English Coastal Path, the 2700 miles to be completed by 2020, by July 2017 100% will be either open or being worked on.

- This was followed by an inaudible talk on 'Health & the Natural Environment' asking LAF's to work with N.H.S. and local Clinical Commissioning Groups. I was sat with the chairman and another member of Oxfordshire LAF we had no idea why we would get involved with such bodies, nor were we enlightened, or if we were, we never heard any reasoning.

There were pre-selected choices of four different 'workshop' topics:- Opportunities for Public Access, Urban Access Issues, Railway Crossing issues & solutions, Multi-user routes. I opted for the latter two.

Multi-user routes workshop:-

As two different workshops were trying to be heard against each other in the main hall it was a complete gamble as to who heard what. A representative from B.H.S. went through the repetitive arguments over horse (and rider) safety stating 80% of equestrian accidents are caused by vehicles being too close to horses or travelling too fast (or both), he informed us that Cambridgeshire & Hampshire are both wanting better use of cycle tracks for horses to

keep them off roads. He closed by handing out an interesting B.H.S. publication 'Advice on Surfaces for Horses'.

The representative from Cycling UK (C.T.C.) made some fairly controversial comments about cyclists being allowed to use any path, made no reference to how this would be financed (replace stiles in walls etc with gates) and even irresponsibly suggested cutting off padlocks which prevented cyclists from going where they wanted. *Personal views are that Natural England should not be having speakers that condone such illegal acts.*

During the lunch break several people asked me about the recent public consultation carried out by North Yorkshire County Council on rights of way maintenance, and asked if I had any idea of the interest shown by the public. That shows that other L.A.F.s were aware of the issue. I couldn't enlighten them.

Railway Crossing issues & solutions workshop:-

Despite heavy traffic noise, these two speakers were quite informative. One of them from Lincolnshire County Council, had similar issues to North Yorkshire with high-speed ECML running through the county but they possibly have a higher number of active branch lines with footpaths and bridleways crossing them than we have. They were part of a working group formed by the Institute of Public Rights of Way & Network Rail and appeared to be making some progress on what were insurmountable crossing problems as Network Rail have quite stringent 'duty of care' issues with passengers/staff and the associated Health and Safety Act regulations. It is a fairly complex issue which is very much a "case by case" matter, with thought and money some situations which were initially a straight forward 'CLOSE IT' matter have been overcome.

I queried if they were working with 'Heritage' railways, which of course come under the same railway regulations as 'real' railways; as yet, they have not, but emphasised that the safety rules are the same as on Network Rail. We only have two 'Heritage' lines in the county, excluding the North York Moors area.

The conference was scheduled to close at 1600hrs after a half hour Questions & Answers session; I (and several others) didn't stay for this, as the acoustics in the main hall made it fairly pointless.

Conclusion

Compared to the very good regional LAF conference at Leeds last year this was not a good use of public money, train fare alone (£130ish) and being away from home for fourteen hours makes a 'National' conference unviable.

I raised the matter of the dire venue with Natural England, by e-mail. This is their response: Thanks for your feedback – I was not at the event or involved with the booking so I have forwarded your comments to Jon Smith.

I have added your comments to my own database of venues as it is not one that I have used and looking at your comments I will not be using it in the future.

Paul A. Sherwood...

To: Pippa Langford NE

Congratulations on managing to arrange yesterday's meeting. The location caused problems not just for our disabled members but was not conducive to the type of meeting.

I would have liked to have had a discussion about LAFs generally and I thought that the last session was going to be about that but it was not.

I would like to see a National LAF having a similar format to the original NCAF, of which I was a member. NE has said that there are no funds. We have a regional LAF and we exist with no funds and rely on the goodwill of our members and NE and the Local Authorities e.g. for a meeting room.

I guess that if I was to beg NE to have a National LAF as described you will reject it. It was rejected when suggested at Sheffield about two years ago.

I had a chat with someone who chairs a Regional LAF including Surrey. They have problems with off road vehicles. I thought that it only happened in the North!!

We could learn from one another. It would good of NE would arrange and pay for the Chairmen of the Regional LAFs to get together.

With help from NE we try to see the minutes of other Regional LAFs in which are near us. Could I suggest that if we are not going to have a National LAF or a chairman's meeting then NE should find some time/money to ensure that all the minutes of the Regional LAFs are easily available. Please do not say they it can be done on Huddle, Huddle is not always easy to navigate. Could there not be one place when NE could ensure that we all see the others minutes?

Regards and thank you for yesterday.

Jerry Pearlman

Dear All

Responding to Jerry's email about the venue etc.

Whilst I think Birmingham is geographically suited for a national event, I agree the venue did not meet our needs.

Jerry's points about the lack of opportunity for members to have focussed discussion certainly chimed with me. As Dave Waterman pointed out, the room was filled with people with a wealth of knowledge and experience, but they weren't

allowed a communal way to share it or exchange views on current challenges. Perhaps the next conference could allow time for focussed general discussion.

Although we will get an opportunity to comment on the content when the papers are circulated, my initial thoughts about the day:

The Event:

Statutory Access, Bruce Cutts – it is encouraging that a substantial amount of access has been secured in perpetuity to the National Nature Reserve land and that it will be made available on line. News that the Coastal Path will be delivered on time is also good.

Health and the Natural Environment, Sarah Preston – explained DEFRA is developing a 25 year Environment Plan focusing on delivering health benefits. This will allow for the creation of “Nature Based Interventions” for people suffering from various ailments. I found this helpful as members of my LAF have recently met with the Head of Public Health (Bradford) to explore ways we can work beneficially together. Although there was willingness on both sides to take it further, it was not clear how. This presentation contained some good ideas. However, I remain puzzled by what seems an over complicated approach to the obvious fact that the natural environment is good for people.

Deregulation Act update, Dave Waterman – I appreciated that Dave attended despite not being able to give us a definite time frame for going forward. I have mixed feeling about the slight hint that the cut-off date may be delayed. On one hand, time is getting very tight but on the other it allows the potential to kick the issue into the long grass yet again.

ROWIPS, Pippa Langford – the overall message was that our ROWIP reviews should be ambitious and forward looking despite the current lack of funding. Pippa also explained that ROWIPs need to broaden their scope to deliver wider benefits such as improved health outcomes, active transport, tourism and social cohesion. The MENE online tool <http://naturalengland.tns-global.com/Default.aspx> should be used to evaluate the proposals. Also, Exeter University are also in the process of developing a tool called ORVAL <http://leep.exeter.ac.uk/orval/>. As some ROWIPs in our region are up for review this year, it is helpful to be able to feed this back to our respective councils. Pippa also clarified that funding will come from Central Sport England. I have since emailed her to ask for more detail about potential funding.

The Workshops – I attended:

1. Urban Access Issues – this was awful. No preparation and very little discussion – learned nothing.

2. LAFs Changing Times, New Approaches – representatives from Shropshire CC explained that it has altered the composition of their LAF works and how it works under a new pilot approach supported by Defra and NE. At first I thought they may be onto something. They had identified many problems in their LAF common to others, e.g difficulty in attracting new members, achieving actual results and a lack of

recognition in the wider community of what they do. As a result, they had rebranded their LAF. It has now reformed as “Shropshire Great Outdoors Strategy Board” with new constitution and members drawn from a wider pool such as health, business and tourism. So far so good. But then it became sinister. We were told that these new and influential members were not interested in discussing the technical issues surrounding rights of way and access land. Instead, future discussions would need to focus on broader issues like health and tourism but without going into boring details. Hazel was there too – its safe to say neither of us was impressed!

Overall, I came away with the feeling that Defra/NE policy and delivery is changing in a way I do not yet fully understand (but must try to catch up). The Health and Environment, ROWIP & LAF Changing Times presentation were all directing us to take a broader strategic view of our own local access strategies. However, I had the distinct impression that it was also an exercise in managing people’s expectations with any imperfections with regard to policy making and delivery completely air brushed from the picture.

Best wishes

Didy Metcalf