

REPORT ON: ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM (EAF) AND NATURAL ENGLAND JOINT SURVEY OF ALL LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide substance that might be included in a draft response to the survey on the value of the England Access Forum (EAF) for members to agree.

2. Natural England and England Access Forum are “Seeking Views”

“In seeking your LAF’s views we would be particularly interested in comments on

- The links between EAF and the LAFs through the regional coordinators.
- The effectiveness of the links between LAFs and Natural England at a national level through EAF.
- The added value that a national body representing LAFs can bring.
- The options for EAF’s development.”

3. Items for Response

As a small urban Local Access Forum, Slough struggles to feel the involvement in the bigger picture that is easier for a larger forum to feel. Consequently, the role of the England Access Forum takes on even more significance for the Slough LAF as it provides the over arching link in the chain of communication on national and regional affairs which must be disseminated to all forums regardless of relevance. So Slough LAF will still receive consultations on Horse riding issues or coastal access for instance and can then decide on

The existence of the England Access Forum provides the impetus to allow regional meetings to have an impact at a higher level, rather than ending with shared practice alone. Bringing local issues to the fore ground on a national stage with explanations/discussions developing from individuals with the same agenda as the local members and not therefore suffering the potential contamination of another body. That agenda is the improvement of access for all, real involvement with local communities and partnership working across the health, business and user groups agendas.

It is evident that in order to best represent all Local Access Forums the EAF must operate autonomously as all LAF’s do, or try to do. The EAF cannot be placed within or be financially dependent on another organisation if the influence it could achieve is to be truly representative of the local opinion it springs from.

- England Access Forum – what should its role and format be?
Options: Remain with Natural England
Receive funding from Defra
Stand alone – be self funding
Receive funding from a variety of sources (guaranteed by central govt)
Become a charity

Funding of the EAF ought to be via Defra, as the individual appointing authorities are already asked to fund individual LAF's and the EAF will provide a valuable consultation asset during the drafting stage of new policy. In the long term there is the potential for the EAF along with Natural England to help make the process of drafting new policy more effective and efficient in terms of being in closer contact with local opinion.

- Should the way that information is currently co-ordinated through the regional co-ordinator alter?

Is there a danger that the communication links could fail?

Communication links are key if the hierarchical structure of the LAF's and role of the EAF is to be successful. This calls for close working practices between LAF co-ordinators and LAF officers in individual authorities and the regional and national Natural England offices.

Sadly since the EAF began it has not been able to begin seriously undertaking its role due to problems with its relationship with Natural England. It is hoped that with the results of this survey and an added motivation from all parties, these difficulties can be left behind and a new positive working relationship developed which benefits all.

APPENDIX – COPY OF CONSULTATION LETTER

Duncan Graham CBE
Chairman of The England Access Forum

Dear LAF Chair,

Review of the England Access Forum:

You will be aware from recent correspondence that Natural England and the England Access Forum are currently discussing future working arrangements. This is timely since it also corresponds to the decision taken at our formative meeting in May 2008, where we agreed to review progress after two years. We are now seeking your views as the Statutory Access Forums.

We recognise the good links between Natural England and LAFs which are developing regionally, and which we wish to continue to support.



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- The added value that a national body representing LAFs can bring.
- The options for EAF's development.

The wealth of experience and knowledge resident within England's 81 Local Access Forums is invaluable and we believe that the England Access Forum has a key role to play representing the LAFs at the national level to Government, Natural England and other national bodies. We wish to see the EAF properly resourced, and your responses will help us assess what is needed.

Please do let us have your LAF's views and also any other comments you might wish to make. We would welcome your views by the end of September 2010 please to Andrew Mackintosh (Andrew.Mackintosh@naturalengland.org.uk), the Natural England secretary to EAF.

Yours sincerely



Duncan Graham CBE
Chairman of England Access Forum
and Analysis



Rob Cooke
Director Environmental Advice
Natural England