

## SLOUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM – 12<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2008

REPORT ON: ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM AND THE MEETING OF LAF MEMBERS IN THE SOUTH EAST – 6<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2008 AT NATURAL ENGLAND OFFICES, LONDON

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform members of the reason for the meeting and what was agreed at the meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> October by representatives of LAFs in the South East Region. Members also need to confirm that Margery Hitchman will continue to represent the Slough LAF at future meetings of SE LAF members.

### 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The need for a national representative body for local access forums has been recognised for some time. It was originally thought by LAFs that the existing National Countryside Access Forum (NCAF) would perform this role, but this group is made up of representatives from the major user organisations eg; the BHS and the Ramblers Association and designed to give advice to Natural England from that viewpoint and so it **can not** represent the views of the 81 Local Access Forums.

2.2 After pressure from Local Access Forums' nationally, Natural England have seen the light and agreed that a new forum is required made up of 2 members of LAFs from each of the Regions in England along with representatives of Natural England. The **England Access Forum** or **EAF**, aims to be the national voice for LAF's working in partnership with Natural England and providing balanced views and feedback on relevant access issues to Natural England and DEFRA.

2.3 The inaugural meeting of the EAF was held on 15<sup>th</sup> May 08 with a subsequent meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept 08. At these meetings the South East was represented by Matthew Balfour of Kent LAF, Alan Marlow of Hampshire and David Brookshaw of Brighton and Hove LAF on a temporary basis. Minutes of these meetings together with the EAF constitution are available to view at <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/leisure/access/eaf/default.htm>

2.4 In order to effectively represent the 81 LAFs across the country, each Region has decided to have a meeting to agree communication arrangements between the LAFs and the regional meeting and between the regional meeting and the EAF; and vice versa. Each Region also needed to formally appoint its representatives to the EAF. The meeting to achieve these aims took place on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2008 for the South East Region.

### 3. Outcomes of the Meeting of LAF Members in the South East

3.1 It was agreed that Matthew Balfour of Kent and Alan Marlow of Hampshire would continue to be the South East representatives on the English Access Forum.

3.2 It was agreed that SE Region communication would be via email exchange between Chairmen of the LAFs and the members representing each LAF for the SE. It

was felt that even though some people are not on email that this is the quickest, most effective way of communicating.

3.3 There are to be two meetings of the SE LAF members every year. It is intended that one of the meetings will be a training type event. There will also be two newsletters a year to be circulated amongst regional LAF membership.

3.4 The South East Region is the largest region in the UK with 17 separate LAFs. There has to be a single point of contact for all matters to do with the SE Region LAF meeting and consequently the EAF. Margery Hitchman is happy to continue to be the representative for the Slough LAF at the regional meeting. This needs to be agreed by the membership of the Slough LAF. **Action**

3.5 Jacqui Wheeler can support Margery's attendance at these meetings by accompanying her if and when necessary. If Margery is unable to attend any future meetings another member would need to attend in her place on an adhoc basis. It would be useful to know who would be willing to attend if it became necessary. **Action**

#### **4. Support from Natural England**

4.1 Natural England has accepted that there is a need for Local Access Forums to engage with each other at a regional level and with Natural England. There are three levels of support required;

- a. Natural England staff time
- b. Resources to employ part-time regional co-ordinators to help LAFs coordinate and organise themselves at a regional level
- c. Resources to provide professional training to LAF members to support the effective delivery of LAF business.

These needs will be addressed as follows:

- a. Sufficient staff time will be allocated to enable each LAF to have a named NE staff contact within their local NE area office. There will be regular exchange of ideas and information including discussions on LAF effectiveness and training and sharing good practice at a regional level.
- b. Natural England has agreed to fund a part-time regional co-ordinator in each region. The regional co-ordinators will normally be selected from LAF Secretaries or other experienced professional with Highways Authorities. **The Regional Co-ordinator for the South East region is Cath Hart who also works as the LAF Secretary for the Hampshire LAF.**
- c. Training needs will be identified by discussions between the regional coordinators and Natural England regional staff. There needs to be a sense of joint ownership and responsibility for training activities.

#### **5. Issues that have regional and national significance**

5.1 The following issues were raised at the meeting and agreed to be issues where the feelings of LAF's ought to be discussed at the national level, that is; at the England Access Forum.

Thames Basin Heath – this affects Bracknell Forest and Surrey

The Marine Bill – this will give Natural England new powers to improve access around the whole of the English coastline and to create a long distance route, the “English Coastal route”. The Bill is due to be put before Parliament this autumn with a draft Outline Scheme to be published by Natural England at the same time. The outline scheme will guide decisions at local level on where the new rights will apply, and the SE LAF members agreed that this is an important issue requiring discussion among all LAFs in the region. After all, everyone enjoys a visit to the seaside! Slough LAF needs to decide what action to take on this. **Action.**

Gating Orders – This was agreed to be an issue for all LAFs in the South East. As statutory consultees for Gating Orders, the SE LAF members meeting felt it would need to get a consensus of how LAFs deal with Gating Orders. **Action.**

Shared Use of Routes – The meeting felt that it would be useful to get some sort of agreement on attitudes towards shared use routes within the SE. But what does shared use mean in Slough? And how does the Slough LAF feel about it? **Action.**

Money for Implementation of ROWIP's – It was agreed at the meeting that this was an important issue for LAFs. Some areas LAFs have been undertaking their own lost ways projects to find routes that they feel ought to be recorded as public and then tying these in with their ROWIPs to identify a current need for a particular route. Funding could then be bid for to put the new routes on the Definitive Map and Statement.

## **6. List of LAF members who attended the Meeting**

Bracknell Forest LAF	Richard Mosses
Brighton & Hove LAF	David Brookshaw
Buckinghamshire LAF	John Elfes
Hampshire LAF	Alan Marlow
Kent LAF	Matthew Balfour
Medway LAF	Rita Hunt
Mid and West Berkshire LAF	Jane Kiely (includes; Reading and Wokingham)
New Forest LAF	Alistair Duncan
Slough LAF	Margery Hitchman
Surrey LAF	Graham Butler
West Sussex & South Downs LAF	Glyn Jones

## **Appendices**

- 1. EAF Constitution**
- 2. Minutes & Agenda of the Meeting of LAF Members in the South East – 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 08**
- 3. Coastal Access Draft Outline Scheme**