

South East Local Access Forum workshop - 3rd March 2009, London

Workshop writeup – How can the LAF have greater influence? How can we publicise LAF?

Influence of LAF

- Tend to be ignored by s94 Bodies other than the 'countryside or rights of way sections of the appointing authority. Even government agencies and departments seem to ignore/not be aware of the role of LAFs. This lack of awareness and involvement is self evident in national guidance for the 3rd round on Local Transport Plans, where LAFs are not listed as a consultee
- Consensus seems to be that influence is easier in smaller authorities or within national park authorities where there is a more joined up approach
- Suggestion that using media is an excellent way for LAFs to make sure their voice is heard – such as ensuring crossings of the A11 were provided as a subway for horses. Important to check the Highways Project Brief at a draft stage
- LAFs need to be aware, and make use of, the political setup within an authority – especially when local elections are on the horizon
- LAFs need to understand that organisations will not bother to consult them if a) they do not know who they are and what they can do, and b) the LAF is not seen as a credible source of balanced advice. Perhaps LAFs need to start off small with a particular issue and then build up their understanding and confidence rather than demanding to be consulted on everything. Caution needed to avoid 'hijacking' by interest groups.
- Is a Directive needed to enforce LAFs being a statutory consultee? Can enforcement action be taken against bodies that do not take LAF advice?

How to publicise LAFs work

- First of all need to ask WHY any person or organisation would want to know what your LAF is doing! Are you trying to engage, inform or influence?
- Good websites are potentially useful, but only if
 - a) LAF members are happy to use the website to keep informed about the work of the LAF
 - b) The website is easy to use and regularly updated
 - c) The website is well linked with other LAFs and related web pages
 - d) The hosting authority is not too strict with corporate look and feel as well as content management
- It is possible to set up a fully independent website for the LAF – if members are happy to keep it updated and contribute content. This can help to keep the LAF seeming independent and with its own identity
- The LAF annual report should be distributed to local councils in the area, but also to libraries, plus named contacts in user groups, authority members, senior officers and s94 Bodies. Invite these people to become involved too – as could be sources of new members in the future
- To get people aware of your LAF one really good idea was to put up posters advising of the next meeting and the agenda -and stick them up in country sites, libraries or selected public rights of way (without littering of course)
- Work with the media once you have something you want to say
- Ask the public for help with project's justification ("yes we want this") and also get them to suggest future agenda items at meetings