

Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum



The Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum (Cambs LAF) is one of a network of groups across England and Wales. It has been set up at the instigation of the Government in recognition of the value of open spaces and rights of way as places for recreation and relaxation.

The Cambridgeshire LAF was set up during the public consultation on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which has led to the creation of “Open Access” areas across the country. In Cambridgeshire the new open access provisions refer to registered Common Land.

LAF members are appointed by the County Council and represent a balanced mixture of land managers and users, not specifically representing any particular bodies. They are volunteers willing to pool their knowledge and enthusiasm to increase the opportunities for responsible use of the countryside.

The Forum meets every two months, on either a Tuesday or Thursday evening, moving the venue around the County. Additional meetings are also held by smaller working groups to cover sub-sections of the work programme e.g. planning, or rights of way.

How is this relevant to you?

The last twenty years have seen major changes in the lives of people in this country, with an ever more mobile population and an increasing concentration of employment in the south. Cambridgeshire has particular problems with road congestion, affordable housing, and a rising population placing demands on local services. The Government, Local Authorities and developers have all put forward plans to try to address these issues.

As a major arable and horticultural area, changes in agricultural policies, including the introduction of the single farm payment and the influence of the global market, may also alter the Cambridgeshire landscape.

With all these pressures it is easy for access to the countryside and other open spaces to become a secondary issue, and opportunities to improve access and enhance the quality of life could be lost.

As a statutory body the Local Access Forum should be consulted on any major developments that may affect public access. This will include not only the potential loss of access from development, but also when new areas for recreation are being considered.

We are keen to hear from people who have a personal interest in countryside access and how it is managed. The knowledge of forum members in areas such as riding, walking, disabled access, land management, off-road driving and conservation will allow constructive and informed discussion to influence Council priorities, recommendations and policies.

The Forum's meetings are open to the public. Various bodies and companies may also be invited to send a representative to a Forum meeting, or to supply further details, so that members can produce an informed decision on how problems may be resolved.

The Access Forum do not comment on individual issues that would normally be within the remit of Council departments, but are able to draw issues of a more general nature to the attention of Council officers, and regularly monitor the work of the County Council's Countryside Access Team.

Work undertaken by the Local Access Forum

- The Cambridgeshire LAF supports the reinstatement of "Lost Highways" of particular value as access routes, before the Government deadline in 2026.
- The group have monitored and contributed to the Local Transport Policy, and been closely involved in developing the Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- They aim to ensure that the results of public consultations are used when the priorities for future Council spending on access and other issues are decided.
- Members have attended public consultations and received presentations on housing and transport network developments across the County, particularly around Cambridge and the M11 corridor.
- They aim to continue to ensure that planners and authorities give firm commitments to the provision of open space and countryside access for all.
- Members have used their expertise to provide comments on Government consultations and Council legislation, highlighting issues concerning disabled access, walking, riding, canoeing, use of farmland and off-road driving.