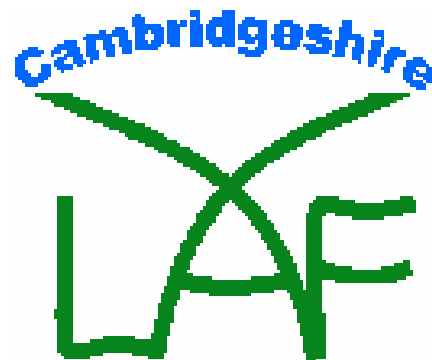


CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

ANNUAL REPORT

2004 – 2005



Introduction from the Chairman - Alan Sidell, May 2005

It is only 8 months since I wrote the introduction to our first Annual Report. However, since then we have made changes to our administrative arrangements such that our year now runs from March in one year to April in the next since this fits better with the workings of the County Council and the election of new members to LAF. Annual reports in future will be produced by the end of June.

One other welcome change in working arrangements is that we now have an officer within the County Council's Countryside Services Team who is dedicated to giving one day a week of her time to LAF. This is already proving to be helpful, particularly to me as Chairman, in accessing relevant information relating to some of the major issues ahead of us.

During the last 8 months we have seen several of our original members depart and we have welcomed replacements so we are now up to full strength. I look forward to the active participation of all members in tackling the issues which are important to all of us. One major piece of work which is ongoing is the preparation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. At the time of writing this introduction the ROWIP is out to consultation and we will need to play an important role in reviewing comments received and assisting the County Council in finalising the Plan. In the Autumn this year the Open Access provisions of the CROW Act 2000 will come into force in the East of England and we need to be satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place.

In my introduction to the previous Annual Report I spoke about the enormous pressures on Cambridgeshire for new developments and the need for us to try to protect existing Rights of Way and access to the countryside, and also cater for the inevitable demand for increased amounts of access. I make no apologies for repeating that message here; we are already looking at proposals for Northstowe, dualling of the A428, and upgrading of the A14. If we are to provide an effective and timely response to proposals such as these, as well as considering the ROWIP, we must consider adopting different methods of working, and we must have the active involvement of all members of LAF, not only at our regular 2-monthly meetings, but also between meetings.

Once again, I would like to record my thanks to all Forum members for their active participation and special thanks to Gail Stoehr, our Secretary, who continues to do sterling work in providing us with necessary papers and chasing us for feedback.

Mission Statement (Nov 2003)

The Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum will provide advice to help ensure significant and measurable improvements in responsible recreational access to the countryside.

Background information

The background to the Annual Report and Information on the following can be found on pages 3 & 4 in the LAF first Annual Report which can be viewed in full at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk or obtained on request.

- The Need for an Annual Report
- The Formation of Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum
- What is a Local Access Forum (LAF)?
- How was the LAF formed?

- Terms of Reference
- Procedural matters
- LAF independence and LAF Logo

The Forum's Second Year

Meetings and membership

At the March 2005 Meeting LAF changed its reporting year from starting in September to April and agreed that its Annual Report would be published in June. This report therefore is a review of a six month period from Sept 2004 to March 2005.

There were four meetings in the reporting period.

September 2004	Wicken Fen
November 2004	Ely
January 2005	Homerton College, Cambridge
March 2005	Hinchingbrooke Country Park

Member	Interest	Area of County
Brian Alden	Access for the disabled	Hunts
May Block	Water based recreation	Cambridge
Doris Brenke	Conservation, riding	East Cambs
Roger Buisson	Nature conservation, land management	S. Cambs
Philip Broadbent Yale	Property management, heritage, walking, cycling, sailing	
Mac Corterell	District Councillor	
Paul Hammett	Farming, cycling, walking	East Cambs
Hally Hardie	Running, orienteering	Hunts
Simon King	County Councillor	
Anthony Morbey	Farming, fishing, shooting, walking, heritage	East Cambs
Antony Pemberton	Land management, rural business, farming	South Cambs
Robert Pitcher	Motorised use, disabled, ethnic minorities	Fenland
Alex Reid	County Councillor	
Judith Rossiter	Parish councils, rural business manager	South Cambs
Mary Sanders	Voluntary/youth work	Cambridge
Robert Sears	Farming and wildlife	Fenland
Alan Sidell (Chairman)	Walking, riding, cycling, transport	South Cambs
Jean Sinclair	Walking, cycling, canoeing, health, young people	Cambridge City
Bill Thompson	Walking	Hunts
Jill Tuffnell	Walking , local government	Cambridge City
Erika Wedgwood	Landscape archaeology, youth	East Cambs
Liz Wright	Horse rider, motorised users, parish councils	Fenland

At the September meeting, Alan Sidell was re-elected as the Chairman and Erika Wedgwood as Vice-Chairman. Some members retired in September 2004 as their term of office came to an end. The new members joined in January 2005. Delays in recruitment meant that LAF operated for several months with fewer members. The November meeting was not quorate and the members attending instead made recommendations to the

following LAF meeting in January. It was agreed that that Cambridgeshire County Council should seek to extend the LAF members' term of office which should end in September 2005 to the end March 2006 and in the first instance write to members asking if they would be willing to stay on.

Operation of LAF

LAF was pleased to support the County Council's recommendations that it would seek to identify a project officer to support and be accountable to LAF and was pleased to welcome Ms Chris Tucker in March 2005.

LAF wished to continue to ensure that it remains 'independent' of the County Council and it considered that a non-county council secretary was important in ensuring that this is maintained.

Members' involvement and proposals

Many members have been active between meetings either by attending discussions with other groups and organisations or exhibitions or by working with colleagues developing a specific area of LAF's work.

In September 2004 LAF considered two proposal papers drafted by members:

The first was based on a paper from Suffolk LAF focused on the needs of users both current and future and it was agreed that the huge, free resource of volunteers should be better utilised. It was also agreed that health as a focus should be added to the work programme. The second a paper titled 'LAF's response to major developments' was adopted as a framework for LAF.

There was a consensus in March that LAF was not getting its message out. It was not influencing the County Council in the way it wished or communicating with the wider public.

Members who have attended site visits or been delegated an area of responsibility have produced reports for consideration by LAF.

Health

A new LAF focus, of 'health' was added to the work programme in September. Fighting obesity, encouraging people to walk short distances instead of taking a car and ways to promote and enhance circular routes including those for riders. A member attended a meeting with the East Region Rural Sport and Recreation Research Project to find out about their project and research. Shortly afterwards Alun Michael began encouraging all LAFs to advise local authorities on the provision of new access land, on the provision of informal recreation, including water based activities. It looks as though this will continue to be a focus in the forthcoming year as the Regional Sports Boards work with all LAFs and regional meetings are arranged.

It was noted that the Department of Health (White Paper) Executive Summary appeared to be a commitment to healthy living without the commitment to provide funding.

Work programme and decisions made at meetings

Although an agenda item for most meetings little progress on the work programme was made during the reporting period. This was due in part to the delay with the recruitment of new members and in part to lack time. Some decisions such as further consideration of the

desirability of setting aside areas of land within developments, for wildlife and for quiet public recreation, and for incorporating new and existing public paths into “corridors” of green space and also the provision and funding for crossings are still to be achieved. LAF annual work programmes are to include agreed targets that can be both monitored and measured as part of an annual review process and work on this will continue in the next reporting period.

There was a consensus in March 2005 that LAF was not getting its message out and it was not influencing the County Council in the way it wished or communicating with the wider public.

The advisory role of the Local Access Forum

The regulations require that the annual report should, at a minimum set out the occasions and issues that the LAF has provided advice during the preceding year and an indication of the bodies to which the advice was given. The table below includes the relevant items:

Date	Advised	On
Sept 2004	CCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian Strategy • Definitive map orders - ‘Application procedure for Public Path Orders altering the Definitive Map and Statement’ • CCC Reorganisation • ROWIP - Questionnaire & Analysis
Nov 2004	Cambs City Council	Local Plan Draft 2
	CCC	ROWIP - Draft Statement of Action
	South Cambs District Council	Local Development Framework
Jan 2005	CCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Open Space • Draft Pedestrian Strategy • Planning for Commons and Access Land • Lost Highways • Management of Byways
	DEFRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Rights of way: consultation on registers of definitive map modification order applications; and highways Act applications and declarations • Public Rights of Way consultation on joint orders and the power to include modification orders
	The National Trust	Landscape East & Wicken Fen Vision
March 2005	EERA	Regional Spatial Strategy
	CCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of 50k Reward Money • Proposed cycling improvements South Cambs
	East Cambs District Council	Proposals by Sustrans for cycle routes from Ely to Barway and Wicken Fen to Priory Bridge

Tracing 'Lost Highways' – The practical experience by Jill Tuffnell

'Armed with notepad and pen, maps and camera I set off to examine the evidence 'on the ground' for what are termed *lost highways*. These are historic rights of way that may not have been identified at the time of the enclosures, or included on the Definitive Map. Now the Countryside & Rights of Way Act has given councils a time-limited period to review the local situation and apply to have suitable candidates effectively added to our paths network.

But how do we judge what is suitable? Cambridgeshire County Council has identified a number of criteria – such as linking a dead-end path to the network, being an existing track or easy to use route, being in an area of demand but short of routes. In particular we have highlighted routes close to growing cities, towns and new settlements – where developers may soon remove the 'lost highway' for ever!

My allotted routes for inspection included several close to Cambridge – near Teversham, Fulbourn and Trumpington – as well as routes in the parishes of Bourn, Croxton and Waterbeach. Some were clearly already used as through routes; others were more difficult to view, obstructed by vegetation, ditches etc. I visited all junctions with existing rights of way and took photos, assessing the problems faced in opening paths up. Some are almost insurmountable – like crossing the main London railway line. But even here a small diversion onto an existing track that is a right of way could be achieved. I was very pleased to identify a number of routes which should greatly enhance our local access to the countryside.'

Horses and Bridleways by Liz Wright

The first myth I'd like to dispel is that horses are ridden by people with money. They are ridden by people who once had money but no longer have it because they now have a horse! Actually the fastest growing group of horse owners is women between 30 and 50.

Why do people ride? Apparently people walk and cycle for health but this is rarely a reason cited by councils for riding. I think people ride to enjoy another being's company, to go out into the countryside in all weathers and to see wildlife, nature and agriculture. Obviously people ride for competitions too but even they need to get their horses fit and many do this by hacking out.

Where riders can safely ride is getting less and less. The byroads that once were safe are turning into rat runs and in Cambridgeshire we have had fatal accidents and severe injuries to both horses and riders. We don't want to ride on the roads, we want to get off the roads but the network of bridleways is hardly available to most of us. Nearly all riders have to hack to the bridleway and road planners seem to think that negotiating a dual carriage way (I'm talking A14 here) is quite possible. No horse in the whole world is bombproof but more importantly no driver is infallible and the mixture of big, kindly animal and metal car is an unforgiving one.

The bridleways are not just a pleasant escape into the country; they are also for our future safety and for children's safety. You wouldn't want your child pedalling along a main road, you'd want a cycle way, yet a child and a pony have to negotiate busy roads to get to bridleways. Riders appreciate bridleways and byways; they are quite literally our lifeline! If riders, don't try and work with all users and with local authorities, then our voice won't be heard which is why I am proud to be on the Local Access Forum.

The Image of Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum

Interaction with the public, groups and organisations and other LAF's

An invitation and poster listing all the meeting dates for the year was sent to every parish. Although somewhat unpredictable the attendance of members of the public at meetings has increased over the first year, as has the number of telephone calls enquiring in to LAF's work. LAF has also received an increased number of letters from organisations such as the Ramblers Association and the British Horse Society mainly highlighting areas which they wanted LAF to look into.

Ways to promote the work of LAF and also ways to publicise the Access Day later in the year are being considered.

Work continues on a leaflet/summary document for future distribution with an aim to raise the LAF profile inform and engage people and organisations.

Website development

The LAF pages of the County Council's website were updated using the County's template. Although LAF had some choice over the text and pictures used the County's standardisation did not give the LAF pages the independent look as hoped.

Links to other groups and organisations sites are beginning to be included.

LAF Budget

Budget for period	Sept 04 - March 05	Sept 03 - Aug 04
Labour (Secretary's fee)	£3522.62	£6,573.37
General administration & other costs (eg training, public notice, letter head, Forum meetings, annual report* and members' mileage** etc)	#£2356.74	£3912.72
Total***	£5,879.36	£10,486.09

Notes

*Annual report costs not included

**Not all members claimed expenses during the period.

***Excludes VAT

excludes members' mileage which was paid out of the CCC budget

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Website: <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/forum/>

The Future

The work programme forms the backbone of LAF's objectives for the future. In addition some of LAF's aims, which it hopes to achieve in the next twelve months, are listed below. These are listed in no particular order of importance.

- LAF's annual work programme is to include agreed targets that can be both monitored and measured as part of an annual review process.
- There will be active involvement of all members not only at the bi-monthly meetings but also between meetings.
- Increase public understanding of 'The Right to Roam' and the legislation (thus increasing the number of people that know about LAF).
- To be recognised as an equal to a statutory consultee by authorities and organisations.
- A route will be found to link with 'Natural England' (as it appears that they are going to be a powerful body).
- LAF will build links with other Local Access Forums in the region.
- LAF will try to protect existing Rights of Way and access to the countryside, and also cater for the inevitable demand for increased amounts of access.
- LAF to be satisfied that the County and District Councils are pushing hard for good access provision in and around the new building and road developments.
- LAF will make sure that the County Council work plan tallies with the priorities given in the ROWIP survey.
- Help will be given to the County Council, using LAF's mixed membership, to agree on a few key areas in which the Rights of Way should show measurable improvement by this time next year.
- There will be evidence that LAF has influenced the County Council in the way it wishes.

June 2005

