

LOCAL ACCESS FORUMS

Frequently asked questions

1. **What is a Local Access Forum?**

A Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory advisory body established under The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002 in accordance with the Countryside + Rights of Way Act 2002.

2. **What does a Local Access Forum do?**

LAFs are statutory advisors to appointing authorities (highways authorities, National Park authorities and any London Borough council which has resolved to establish one or more forums) on the improvement of public access to land within their area for open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area. A LAF is a statutory consultee on:

- any bylaws to be made by access authorities in respect of access land;
- councils' proposals to appoint wardens for access land;
- Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

A LAF was also consulted by the former Countryside Agency on draft maps of open country and registered common land, land which is now registered as Open Access Land, primarily the larger Commons in Cambridgeshire. The statutory duty is wide ranging in its scope.

3. **Is there a Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum?**

Yes.

4. **But does countryside access conform to council boundaries?**

Outside popular tourist areas like National Parks, it would be virtually impossible to draw boundaries around patterns of countryside access. The County Council does not rule out participation in more than one LAF but believes efforts should be concentrated in one body, albeit liaising with neighbouring LAFs.

5. **How will you ensure the Forum does not become a focus for arguments between land owners and ramblers?**

The membership must be balanced between users and land managers and the Regulations oblige the County Council to appoint to the LAF people who appear to represent interests rather than organisations. Furthermore, a range of other interests such as tourism, transport, health, economic development etc. etc. must be represented. The County Council wants to see strong representation from those interests. The Government expects LAFs to deal with strategic issues rather than individual cases.

6. **How can I become a member of the Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum?**

In general, we will be looking for people who have an interest in access, from any one or more perspectives, and can demonstrate an ability to work together. The Regulations require us to advertise widely for prospective

members and we will ensure our selection criteria and methods give maximum opportunities to the widest audience. Recruitment takes place annually with applications usually to be returned by Easter so that appointments can be made for the May.

7. **If I'm not a member of the Forum, how can I keep track of its work and results?**

Like local government processes, the LAF has to conduct its business in public i.e. meetings will be open to members of the public and publicised in advance, agendas and papers will be available for scrutiny. The LAF produces an Annual Report showing both the content and outcome of discussions. The County Council rotates the meeting venue of the LAF, giving communities around the county an opportunity to attend meetings. Meetings, of which there will be at least three per year, will be publicised in advance.

8. **Who is in charge of the Forum?**

Whilst the County Council is responsible for setting up and supporting the LAF, including arranging secretarial support, it is an independent body. The LAF elects its own Chair, decides its own work programme and reports to relevant bodies as it sees fit.

9. **Where can I find out more?**

- Contact Countryside Access Team E-mail: cst@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 715 558
- The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002 are available from The Stationery Office Ltd, ISBN 0110299922 and on the internet at: www.legislation.hmsso.gov.uk