



ANNUAL REPORT

2004 – 2005

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CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

It is a great pleasure for me to present the second Annual Review of the Essex Local Access Forum. It gives details of our activities and some of the issues we have tackled over the last twelve months.

The second year of the forum has seen us start to develop our own identity and our role as a statutory consultee for a wide range of subjects.

I would like to publicly thank the members for making the Essex LAF the success it is. They have given a considerable amount of time and effort over the last year. It is refreshing to see people with diverse involvement in the countryside be able to engage in constructive, meaningful and often humorous debate on varied issues but still be able to form a view point that the LAF can put its name to. I'm sure all members would also like me to thank Merryll for all her hard work in ensuring the LAF runs as smoothly as it does.

One of our main aims for the next year must be to ensure that the County Council makes good progress on the rights of way improvement plan as unfortunately the LAF has not felt progress has been satisfactory this past year. I look forward to the input the LAF will have with the ROWIP and being able to report in next year's annual review that the plan is finalised and ready to make a real difference to all users of the countryside in Essex.

Finally I would encourage anyone wanting to get involved in the LAF to look at our website (www.essexlaf.com) where details of meeting times and membership opportunities can be found. We welcome members of the public to all of our meetings and can assure you of a relaxed atmosphere.



Simon Gibson
Chair Essex LAF



INTRODUCTION

The Local Access Forum for Essex was established by Essex County Council (the Appointing Authority) in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

As required by 'The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002' this is the second Annual Report of the Local Access Forum for Essex which I have pleasure in submitting to the County Council as the appointing authority.

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

The Local Access Forum for Essex covers the whole of Essex excluding the unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock.

Thurrock Unitary Authority has established a Local Access Forum.

MEMBERSHIP

The Local Access Forum for Essex was started in August 2003 in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Out of the 16 members 2 resigned and 1 had their membership terminated due to lack of attendance. There have been 3 new members appointed for the start of Year 3, in October. This is a natural progression towards the rolling programme of membership in line with the guidance.

At the September meeting Mr Simon Gibson was re-elected for a third term as Chairman and Mrs Nicola Haycroft was re-elected for a second term as Vice Chairman.

Forum members:

Alan Adcock
David Anderson
Kevin Ascott
Michael Brash
Bob Drane
Jenny French
Simon Gibson
Charles Gooch
Lawrence Hammond
Nicola Haycroft
Norman Hunt
Carol King
Simon Leatherdale
Susan Patrick
Richard Tattersall
Edward Woods

MEETINGS



LAF
Local Access Forum Essex

**Interested
in the
countryside?**

Want to have **your say** on the future of public access across our county?

NEXT PUBLIC MEETING:
6th September 2005 2pm - 5pm
Central Baptist Church
Victoria Road South, Chelmsford CM1 1LN.

or call
01245 437274

Public Rights of Way, Essex County Council, County Hall, Chelmsford CM1 1QH

Agenda can be found on our website:
www.essexlaf.co.uk

The Forum met on 5 occasions during the year and venues were kept to Chelmsford as it was the central location for all members and for members of the public to attend.

Meetings usually last an average of 3 hours. All meetings were held on a Tuesday afternoon from 2 – 5pm. During year 2 the Forum tried holding a summer meeting in the evening to allow more of the public to attend but this was found not to be a success.

In order to encourage networking between the members, meetings are followed by tea, coffee and snacks. This has helped gel the members into an enthusiastic and cohesive group.

In accordance with the Guidance, in order to attract the public, meetings are advertised in the local press, on the website and the Agenda and Minutes can be found in all main libraries.

TOPICS DISCUSSED

1. Defra consultations:

Rights of Way registers and Joint Orders

Consultation on Diversion of Rights Of Way

Confirmation of Bylaws relating to countryside recreation: Proposals for change

Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles – the Governments framework for action

There have been 3 Defra consultations for discussion and comment. These provoked much debate and discussion and letters were sent to Defra with the Forum's response. There was one Defra document which was a response to last year's consultation on Mechanically Propelled Vehicles.

2. A120 Braintree – Marks Tey

LAF was consulted on the Highways Agency A120 Braintree – Marks Tey Improvement scheme. The Forum's response was collated with the Public Rights of Way response and returned to the Highways Agency. LAF's response was relevant to road building in general rather than for the specific proposed route which they had issues with.

3. Enforcement

The Enforcement and Liaison officer from the Public Rights of Way department gave a training session to the LAF highlighting and explaining the issues that are dealt with by this department. This need was highlighted last year when LAF was asked to look at the Rights of Way Maintenance Policy.

4. Public Questions

A number of questions from the public were taken and were dealt with by Essex County Council and clarification was sought from Asset Management over the disposal of ECC land and the creation of rights of way on the land prior and subject to the sale of the land.

5. Rights of Way Improvement Plan

By May 2005 the LAF was becoming increasingly concerned by the lack of progress on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. It was felt that if any further time was lost the plan would need to be rushed through and an important opportunity would be lost. As a result of this a letter was sent to Cllr Bass as Head of Highways and Transportation, expressing our concerns. At the September meeting the LAF was happy to report that a letter had been received outlining the steps which had been taken to improve the situation. LAF will now be monitoring progress through regular updates at each meeting.

Members presentations:

It was decided that members would give presentations on their representative issues thereby engendering better understanding by other members of the Forum. So far this year we have had talks from 3 of the members:

Cycling – Lawrence Hammond

Walking – Kevin Ascott

Conservation – Simon Leatherdale 'The interaction of access and conservation'

SITE VISITS



Members attended a site visit to Marks Hall Estate on 16th August 2005. Richard Tattersall and Simon Leatherdale led the visit and discussed various issues that Marks Hall Estate has with the different rights of way which cross the estate, including the issue of unauthorised use of the rights of way and the problems they face. Simon discussed the issues of access to the woodlands adjoining the estate. The benefits of having site visits are seen in the way that the members have a greater understanding of the issues effecting PRow officers on the ground.

BUDGET

Venue – hire and catering (5 meetings)	£ 1 737.46
Site Meeting expenses	£ 150.00
PAGE Media Group	£ 1 697.00
Meeting Adverts for Year 2	£ 3 600.00
Adverts for applications for Year 3	£ 2 491.00
Members expenses	£ 937.90
TOTAL	£10 473.36

THE FUTURE

Involvement in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan will form a key part of our role over the coming year.

We will continue to look at the key issues raised in the new Public Rights of Way Policy as discussed in the last Report. This year we discussed the issues of Enforcement issues and Publicity and Promotion (the future of the Ways and Means magazine and the future of the Byways leaflet). Still to be discussed are issues such as Service Delivery. The forum is looking forward to being able to assess and discuss the new draft policy on its completion.

The Forum always aims to react to issues as they arise.

