

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LEEDS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM APRIL 2006 – APRIL 2007

1. Chairman's Introduction

Welcome to the third Annual Report of the Leeds Local Access Forum, an independent advisory body established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

On a glorious summer evening in June, the Forum held its first site visit which was to the Parlington Estate, where we were shown a series of proposed improvement measures to the rights of way network there. Members found the visit very informative and helpful. I look forward to other site visits to assist the Forum in its work of advising Leeds City Council on ways to improve public access and open-air recreation for the benefit of all.

Again the Forum has advised on the emerging Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), which next year will be issued for public consultation before it has to be adopted in November 2007.

The Forum was consulted on proposals for the first gating orders in Leeds. Gating orders restrict the public use of rights of way, particularly through ginnels, if there is sufficient evidence of crime and/or anti-social behaviour. In providing advice on such proposals the Forum has to balance the practical need for making gating orders with the Forum's purpose of advising on improving public access for the benefit of all.

It was a great disappointment to the Forum to learn that the block grant for the Access Management Grant Scheme had been withheld by DEFRA. The Forum has asked that Leeds, as one of the last areas in the country to be mapped, will be given priority when funding is resumed.

New regulations governing local access forums came into force in March, and they prescribe an additional matter on which the Forum is to advise. Not only will the Forum be concerned with recreational access, but it will also need to advise on non-recreational 'functional' or 'utility' access issues. The Secretary of State's Guidance, to which the Forum is legally obliged to have regard, states: *It should be remembered that historically most rights of way developed to meet a functional need and although public rights of way are often prized for their recreational value, functional access can still be important on many routes, especially in built up areas.* This is particularly relevant to us in Leeds.

All meetings of the Forum are open to the public. If there is a topic you feel the Forum should address please contact me through the Secretary*.

Finally, I should like to thank the members of the Forum for their help and support during the past year, and also to thank officers of Leeds City Council, in particular Joanne Smyth (lead officer) and Hannah Bailey (secretary), who have ensured the smooth running of the Forum.

Mike Willison
Chairman, Leeds Local Access Forum

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1. Background

The main focus of attention for the Leeds Local Access Forum (LLAF) was on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Open Access and large development sites, such as Kirkstall Forge. Members have also continued to attend the Liaison meetings for the West Leeds Country Park and Green Gate Ways.

Throughout the year the Forum Representatives have responded to many of the Consultation papers and other areas of correspondence and have given their advice in compiling the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

2. Dates of Meetings

6th June 2006 site visit to Parlington Estate
14th November 2006
20th February 2007

Members of the Forum and attendance at the various meetings of the Leeds Local Access Forum can be seen in section 15.

3. Business of the Forum

The following is a record of the main items of business dealt with by the Forum; further detail can be obtained by referring to the minutes of the meetings.

Particular reference is made to items which gave rise to discussion and to items where the Forum agreed that specific advice be made to Natural England and the Government.

4. Parlington Estate.

A site visit was arranged to view a series of proposed improvement measures to certain public rights of way in the Parlington, Sturton Grange, Aberford and Garforth Areas of Leeds.

During the course of the site visit Officers explained to Forum Members what measures were being proposed at particular points, a representative from the Estate also provided comment on behalf of the land owners.

This has been an ongoing project and the Forum Members were able to act as mediator to resolve some longstanding objections. Feedback was also given to the Forum later in the year.

5. **Election of Chair and Vice-Chair.** Dr Mike Willison was re-elected as Chair and explained to the meeting that the Vice-Chair had resigned due to a recent move abroad. The Chair formally thanked Stephanie for all her hard work and wished her well in the future.
6. **Vacancies.** Three vacancies were advertised in the local press and on the Council's website however no prospective members had come forward. A letter had also been sent to the National Farmers Union (NFU), Country Landowners Association, (CLA) and the British Horse Society, (BHS) in a bid to attract interest in the role. Members were reminded that there were vacancies for representatives of users of rights of way and one for owner and occupier interests. It was felt that the Council's appointment procedure was perhaps too bureaucratic for a voluntary position and that the terms of reference should be updated once the new guidance had been issued by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
7. **Annual Report for 2005/06.** The annual report was approved which outlined the work of the Forum for the year. Forum Members advised that the report should be made available on the Council's website.
8. **Rights of Way Improvement Plan.** Much of the Forum's work this year focussed on the rights of way improvement plan, particularly the questionnaire. At the November meeting, the results were presented to the Forum highlighting the following key points from the 775 returned questionnaires which had been input:
 - The majority of respondents were walkers who used public rights of way for fitness and leisure;
 - Over 80% of walkers preferred using circular routes;
 - 69% of people accessed the countryside by private motor vehicle;
 - 91% of users surveyed were White British;
 - The mostly commonly cited problems for rights of way users were overgrown vegetation, poor signage and dogs;
 - Horse riders made regular use of public rights of way, with over half of these indicating that they would be willing to use additional routes on a toll riding basis;
 - 76% of cyclists utilised public rights of way, generally over long distances;
 - 40% of respondents expressed a preference for route maps;
 - 52% of individuals would like to obtain information on public rights of way from the Council's website.
9. **Open Access.** Members' attention was drawn to correspondence received from the Rivers Access Campaign. The issues were discussed in broad terms and the implications of the offer of a presentation. It was felt that a briefing on the issue would

clarify the key points, although the LLAF was unwilling to commit to supporting the campaign at this early stage.

Members of the Forum were disappointed to hear that this year's block grant for the Access Management Scheme had been withheld by DEFRA due to funding issues. Whilst this affected other grant receiving schemes and organisations, Leeds was felt to be at a further disadvantage as it had been one of the last areas in the country to be mapped as part of phase 1 of the project. Although this exercise had now been completed and the draft leaflet produced, there were now no funds to implement its production at phase 2.

The Chair drafted a letter to the Chief Executive of Natural England expressing concern and dissatisfaction of the Forum with the present situation; and expressed the need to secure a commitment from Natural England, that Leeds will be given priority for any funding subsequently released, given the city was one of the last areas to be mapped.

10. Dog Control and Gating Orders – Response to Consultations. The Chair explained that under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2000, the local authority had the power to make Dog Control and also Gating Orders and the LLAF was identified as a statutory consultee on these matters.

A recent Dog Control Order had subsequently been advertised on 21st September 2006, giving twenty eight days notice for representations to be received. However, due to the cancellation of the planned LLAF meeting on 19th September, the Forum was not able to make any comment on this occasion as the notice period had now expired. It was accepted that the LLAF will not be able to respond to all consultations however, arranging meetings throughout the year will perhaps help Officers to give the LLAF time to consider these Orders.

It was decided that potential Orders be reported to the Chair by Officers for initial consideration. If the Chair felt it necessary, then the Orders could be reported to the LLAF for further consultation. It was agreed that this method be piloted and then reviewed at a later date.

11. West Leeds Country Park and Green Gateways. Following the presentation given the previous year outlining the proposals for this project, it was agreed that Didy Metcalf be appointed as the LLAF representative on the West Leeds Country Parks and Green Gateways. Six information leaflets in relation to the scheme will be produced, the first of which was about to go into print. Funding had also recently been secured for a temporary Project Officer to take the project forward.

12. Leeds Country Way Publication. Forum Members received the revised pack of new leaflets for this key recreational route. The Chair attended the official launched on 26th September 2006 at Golden Acre Park By Councillor J Procter, Executive Member for Leisure.

13. Responses to Consultations on Draft regulations and Circulars. Throughout the course of the year, the Forum discussed and gave responses on some of the following documents:

- **Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.**
- **Kirkstall Forge development site.**
- **DEFRA – Implementing Rights of Way Improvement Plans**
- **DEFRA – Guidance on Local Access Forums in England**
- **Natural England – Access news letters, numbers 21, 22, 23 & 24**

14. Relevant Documents. Copies of the following documents can be obtained by contacting the Leeds Countryside and Access Unit on 0113 3957 400. These documents will also be available on Leeds City Council Website.

- Leeds Local Access Forum Terms of Reference
- Approved minutes of all the Leeds Local Access Forum meetings

15. LEEDS LOCAL ACCESS FORUM – ATTENDANCE OF MEETINGS

Name	Representing	06/06/07	14/11/06	20/02/07
Dr M. Willison (Chair)	Walking interest	✓	✓	✓
S. Goodhall (Vice-Chair)	User of Rights of Way	A	Resigned vacant	vacant
Mr P. Maude	Cycling interest	✓	✓	✓
Mrs D. Metcalf	Horse Riding interest	✓	A	A
Mr F. Hirst	Farming interest	A	✓	✓
Vacant	Farming interest	-	-	-
Vacant	Walking interest	-	-	-
Mrs D. Lawson	Land Owning interest	✓	✓	✓
Cllr R. Harrington	Ward Member for Gipton and Harehills & Shadow Spokes Person for Leisure	A	✓	-
Cllr C. Fox	Ward Member for Adel & Wharfedale	✓	✓	✓
In attendance				
Mrs J. Smyth	Leeds City Council (Countryside and	-	✓	✓

	Access Manager)			
Mr J Grieve	Leeds City Council (Secretary of the Leeds LAF)	✓	-	-
Ms H Bailey	Legal and Democratic Services	✓	✓	✓
Mr B Buckenham	Leeds City Council Assist Countryside and Access Manager	✓	-	-
Mr R. Brookes	Leeds City Council (Development Officer)	✓	✓	✓
Ms J Watts	Senior Ranger	-	✓	-
Ken Bell	Legal Services	-	-	✓
Hannah Ress	Neighbourhoods & Housing	-	-	✓
Trudie Canavan	Neighbourhoods & Housing	-	-	✓
Brent Brady	Neighbourhoods & Housing	-	-	✓
Rob Kirton	Neighbourhoods & Housing	-	-	✓
Richard Holdsworth	Highways	-	-	✓
Mr P Bowers	Leeds City Council Legal Services	A	✓	✓
Mr N Holliday	Parlington Estate Representative	✓	-	-

Key:
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A Apologies
- Did not attend