

Local Access Forums and Discovering Lost Ways

Natural England wants to ensure that the Discovering Lost Way (DLW) project delivers value for money public benefits and is in tune with what our stakeholders want. To help us achieve this we are seeking the views of local access forums (LAFs) on the future scope and direction of the project. If you are a LAF member, please have a look at the questions on page 2 and provide us with your views. We value the advice that LAFs can provide, as we want our decisions to be properly informed.

Legislation in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 means that any historic rights of way not recorded¹ on the definitive map by 2026 will be extinguished. The Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) asked the Countryside Agency to facilitate the researching of historic documents and claiming of unrecorded rights to prepare the way for this change. Responsibility for the project was passed to Natural England in October 2006.

During 2007 Natural England is conducting a review, through a series of "Pathfinder" projects and a programme of structured stakeholder engagement. The purpose of the review is: -

- To evaluate the existing DLW delivery framework
- To better define Natural England's role in this work
- To define the optimal and most cost effective approach to enable the delivery of identified public benefits

We are looking for solutions that are: -

- Achievable & realistic- simple, pragmatic
- Integrated – locally relevant, adding value, works with partners

¹ Defra intend to introduce regulations during 2007 that will safeguard all claimed routes from extinguishment.

- Effective & efficient – Avoid waste, focus on where we can obtain optimum benefit

Pathfinders

As part of developing the way forward for the project, we are testing several approaches to translating research into routes on the ground. These 'Pathfinder projects' are using research already completed in certain areas as well as trying out new approaches in other areas.

The first two Pathfinder projects, in Cheshire and Shropshire, are using the results of completed research in the form of case files to examine how best to get discovered routes onto the map. In Cheshire, we are making a small number of applications for definitive map modification orders whereas in Shropshire we are examining how a local authority might use evidence without anyone making a formal application.

Work in Nottinghamshire, under Pathfinder 3, is examining how we might focus research so that we concentrate on getting evidence of routes that will provide the greatest public benefit. We are also looking at how best to involve local people in this process.

Pathfinder Project 4, in Herefordshire, involves a sub-group of the local access forum helping to develop the base map before the Archive Research Unit enters the county. This group will meet with local people (such as footpath users and parish councils) to establish local priorities and needs and will coordinate local research activity.

Finally, as part of Pathfinder 5, we are looking at ways that local people can be involved by

- Talking to established local volunteer groups already engaged in lost ways research. We want to see if their work could be built into the future development and delivery of the project.

- Seeking the views of local access forums on the scope and future direction of DLW and their role in the process.

This will link in to other work underway in developing a database of surveying authorities to provide a resource of information reflecting local circumstances.

The outputs from these projects will all contribute to the review at the end of this year to determine the way forward for the DLW programme.

Is there a role for LAFs in DLW?

Pathfinder 4 will give us an insight into the role that a LAF could effectively have in the project but we are keen, through Pathfinder 5, to gauge a wider body of opinion on how LAFs could contribute to the delivery DLW so that it reflects local needs and circumstances.

It will only be possible to talk directly to a small number of LAFs before the outcome of the review is reported to Ministers in December but we wish to extend the opportunity to all LAFs to comment on what they consider to be the scope and future direction of DLW. We are particularly interested in how you see your LAF engaging with the project.

We have posed a series of questions that we would like you to consider and comment upon. We are keen to capture your views not only on what the LAF could/ should be doing in response to the 2026 cut-off date but also on the contribution that lost ways could make to the overall access experience in your area.

The purpose of these questions is to trigger discussion on the wide range of issues that surround the recording of historic rights of way and the management and maintenance of a network that meets today's needs. We hope that you will think "outside the box" and help us to identify and clarify the potential benefits (and disbenefits) of DLW and what needs to change to achieve these.

The Questions

It is 2020 and you have just come back from a day out with friends using the rights of way in your favourite bit of countryside. You are delighted with what you experienced. Why – what did you experience? How did the maps you used contribute to that experience?

Given the current situation and procedures for recording routes on the definitive map what needs to change to enable you to enjoy your great day out in 2020?

Local access forums have been set up to give advice on public access.

What role do you see the LAF having in DLW?

If this required the LAF becoming more involved in route specific discussions how could this be handled?

What relationship do you see between DLW and the ROWIP?

Deadline for comments

As already mentioned we are required to report to Ministers in December on the operational delivery of the project post 2007/08. If you would like the views of your LAF to inform this report then your comments must be submitted to Natural England **no later than 30 October**. We realise that, given the tight timetable, it might not be possible to consider this matter at your next meeting and it might be necessary to provide a response via correspondence.

The report to Ministers is likely to be the start of a process so any comments received after the 30 October deadline will still be of value in determining how this work is taken forward by Natural England.

Your comment should be sent to Lorna Stafford on the email below.

Stakeholder Workshops

In order to inform the review of DLW, we are undertaking a programme of stakeholder engagement. Through a series of three independently facilitated workshops we are gathering views from a wide range of interests looking at the options for delivering DLW and the roles that Natural England and partners could play. In addition, a Technical Working Group is also meeting to consider more detailed issues focussing on the researching process, and feeding this into the review as well. The knowledge, interest and ideas from stakeholders will all help to inform and influence the future of DLW.

DLW staff changes

Welcome to Amanda Earnshaw who is now acting as Major Project Manager for DLW and is based in Newcastle. Lorna Stafford is temporarily supporting the Stakeholder Engagement team in place of Victoria Nicholls who has left the team to continue her studies. We also wish Eleanor Brown all the best in her new role in Geology.

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Website address: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/leisure/access/default.htm>

We also have an information line for Discovering Lost Ways available for members of the public and volunteers. Please encourage any volunteers that you know of who are interested in the project to register their interest with the information line using the contact details below.

Email: dlw@countryside.gov.uk

Or write to:
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