

Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Report Proforma

* Reporting year	April 2013 to March 2014
* Name of LAF	Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum
* Name of LAF secretary	Paul Harris

Review of Current reporting year

Were you successful in meeting the achievements set out in your Annual Report or LAF work programme? Please provide supporting information.

Introduction from the Chair

The Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (OCAF) aims to protect and improve opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside of Oxfordshire. We do this by giving advice to local authorities and other statutory bodies – by statute they are required to take our views into account as they make their decisions.

OCAF is an independent body, all our members are volunteers and we normally meet two to three times a year. If you would like to learn more about our activities, please access our website www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf or contact the Forum secretary.

OCAF has met twice in the past year plus we have had a workshop to debate and examine the emerging draft second Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP).

We are lucky to have two new members join us – Jason Robertson representing off-road vehicular users and Stuart McGinness representing mountain biking, training and youth work

Troth Wells, Chair and equestrian interest

Work undertaken during the year

The group doesn't work to an annual plan. We mainly focused on working to advise Oxfordshire County Council on all aspects of preparing their second RoWIP (currently termed the Rights of Way Management Plan), including examining national and local user research and understanding the use and demands on the network. The forum sought to question, understand, and support the maintenance work of the highway authority and the possibility of developing a new approach to categorising rights of way issue management and prioritisation. A stand-alone workshop enabled LAF members to scrutinise and contribute to the emerging RoWIP2 so the document was able to be improved before being issued for the 12 week statutory consultation in January.

* How many Open Access Restriction cases have you been informed about/involved with?
There were no such cases in Oxfordshire
* Give up to three examples of advice given by your LAF to section 94 bodies:
This year our work has focused on the development of the draft second RoWIP for Oxfordshire
Give up to three examples where you have encountered difficulties; explain what mechanisms could be put in place to alleviate this issue:
<p>The following examples were used in our 2012/13 annual report and are repeated here as they are still relevant</p> <p>Problem 1 – organisations ignoring advice of the forum. Solution – establish LAF ombudsman to ensure consideration is properly given or enforced</p> <p>Problem 2 – Members do not have enough time to access Huddle or wade through complex consultations. Solution – Natural England to provide ‘LAF-sized’ summaries to the key facts</p> <p>Problem 3 – LAF not being consulted. Solution, make LAFs statutory consultees for all Defra, Natural England and other relevant consultations from other departments and NDPBs</p>
Do you have any issues with recruitment of members from particular interest groups? Does this hinder your work in any way?
<p>There seems to be little awareness and appreciation of the role of the LAF outside of the access professionals or access organisations. More work needs to be done nationally to give LAFs a substantial and influential role e.g. deciding on the distribution of regional paths for communities funds.</p> <p>The group has striven to get more landowners and farmers on board and has only recently managed to attract some.</p>
Comments from appointing authority
Members of the Local Access Forum have played an essential role in our work to review the first RoWIP and develop the second plan and get it to the consultation. There is a big challenge to transform the RoWIP into action on the ground and we hope that the LAF continues to play a significant part. The authority will do what it can to encourage new members to join and for existing members to feel valued and continue to contribute to current and emerging areas of work and for the LAF or our administration to adapt to meet members’ needs.

Forward Look

What are your priorities for next year (list up to 3)

These are the same priorities we had for 2012/13 annual report as they are still relevant:

- Advising Oxfordshire County Council on the on-going impacts and possibilities caused by the reduction in central and local government funding.
- Giving advice and support to the County Council in the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan or any countryside access strategy
- Giving advice to government in response to consultations or on matters that the forum consider are important

***What support/training will you need to be able to deliver these priorities?**

- 1) A supportive appointing authority
- 2) Simple summaries of complex areas from Natural England
- 3) Organisations to have to take note of LAF advice and to be held to account where they do not
- 4) training events held regionally
- 5) chances to meet with other LAFs
- 6) no over-reliance on websites and emails

Do you perceive any barriers to delivering your priorities?

- 1) Staff time of the LAF Secretary to be able to support the group; although this the support received is very good.
- 2) Time that it takes for volunteer members to commit to the group and work within the legislative constraints
- 3) Number and availability of LAF members
- 4) Limited time available to members to consider and respond to complex areas of legislation

Current membership (from April 2014)

Membership stands at a healthy 15. With 6 user interest members, 4 landowner/manager interests and 5 other interest members.

Land Manager interests

- **Andrew Hawkins** Woodland owner, woodland management, conservation, tree management, wildlife, education, walking and cycling.
- **Harry St John** Land Agent, land management, conservation management, land and highway law.
- **Nigel Fisher** Twenty five years of practical conservation experience with BTCV, Countryside Management Projects, Natural England and Oxford University.
- **Philip Chamberlain** Third generation arable farmer near Wallingford. Hosts educational visits about food production and conservation. Farm includes permissive access.

User interests

- **Christopher Gowers** Walker and elector of commons management. Strong interest in education for environmental citizenship - including walking for health
- **John Griffin** Cyclist (for transport and recreation) and walker; Parish and former District Councillor, Chilterns AONB Conservation Board, planning, countryside, archaeology and sustainability
- **Stuart McGinness (Vice-chair)** Off-road cycling. Trail leader and club coach. Chair of Witney Mountain Bike Club

- **Sarah Martin** Walking and cycling, botany, path creation and repair, community fundraising
- **Jason Robertson** Responsible 4x4 use of the countryside and keen walker. Oxfordshire ambassador for Green Lane Association and Tread Lightly
- **Troth Wells (Chair of OCAF)** Equestrian access to the countryside and urban green spaces. County Access and Bridleways Officer and Chair of Oxfordshire British Horse Society

Other interests

- **Ian Anderson** Environmental enhancement within farmed landscapes
- **Rodney Rose** Oxfordshire County Council Deputy Leader
- **Anne Luttmann-Johnson** Solicitor, disability specialist. Wheelchair access to the countryside, education, farming
- **Gordon Garraway** Improving countryside access, developing recreational walks, Oxford Green Belt Way co-ordinator, parish path warden, rights of way consultant to and executive member of CPRE Oxfordshire.
- **Clare Mowbray** Executive officer, Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum. Nature conservation, external fundraising, partnerships in countryside working

We can have up to 22 members. ***Expressions of interest for new members are always welcomed*** – particularly for landowning/farming, young people and other interests not currently represented in the group. Please read the OCAF web pages on www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf and give the Secretary a call on 01865 810226 – or why not come along as an observer to a meeting?