



Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF)

for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire

Annual Newsletter

Incorporating Annual Report

2009 – 2010

Chairmen's Report

The Joint Local Access Forum for Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire (widely known as the JLAF) was set up under the terms of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* and held its first meeting in July 2003. Its statutory role is to advise its Councils and other specified organisations on access to and enjoyment of the countryside. Additionally it advises and comments on all other matters relating to the public's enjoyment of open air activities.

Membership

Membership criteria are set out in the Act: One Councillor from each of the Councils and a further 19 members drawn from the general public who have a particular area of expertise and are committed to furthering the aim of access to the countryside. Appointments are made by the Local Authorities. We are pleased to be able to report that we have a full complement of members. Currently 7 represent land owning interests (rural and urban fringe farming, estate management and those with a knowledge of farming and land owning representative bodies), 10 representing user interests (including horse riding, cycling, walking, carriage driving, trail riding, off-road running and open spaces) while 2 fall in the "other" category. During the past year the three year tenure of membership expired for eight members. Five were re-appointed and four new members joined to bring the total to the full twenty two. We were sorry to lose our member who had a special knowledge of disabled matters but are confident that we continue to keep those issues firmly in mind in our deliberations.

Meetings and Working Methods

The JLAF meets three times a year, a decision made by its members – in the past year on 7th November 2008, 6th March and 3rd July 2009. We consider that this allows time for meetings to be properly prepared and appropriate follow-up action to be taken. This should, in theory, allow time for all members to contribute to the various Consultations to which we respond but often timescales are unrealistically short. To cover this eventuality we have a small number of "position statements" which guide the Officers in making decisions which are then taken to the next meeting of the JLAF for ratification. All our members are now on email which makes informing and consulting with them that much easier.

JLAF meetings are held at the Frys Club and Conference Centre, Somerdale, Keynsham, a venue which is central to the area and has good public transport links. Attendance during the past year has averaged 15 members. We are disappointed that we have normally only had one Councillor out of three at meetings. We value Councillors attending to get the benefit of a two-way exchange of information. The other side of the coin, though, is that we have had the regular attendance of Public Rights of Way Officers and their staff.



Serving, as we do, three Unitary Authorities we find that there is a considerable workload for the voluntary Officers. To help overcome this, in addition to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman we have made a “non-statutory” appointment of a Deputy Chairman. The three Chairmen, along with the JLAF Secretary, meet before each full JLAF meeting to agree the agenda and meet two weeks after the full meeting to agree the draft minutes and actions. In addition, the three Chairmen meet at an “interim meeting” to discuss general matters without an agenda.

Having three Chairmen enables each of the Chairmen to lead with one of our three Councils. We find this is particularly useful in representing the JLAF on Public Rights of Way Liaison Groups (PROWLG). We are fortunate that two of the three Councils (each of our Councils) has a PROWLG, an informal group that meets three times a year to discuss the detail of the public rights of way networks. This enables the JLAF to perform a more strategic and wide-ranging role. We are fortunate in that each Chairman represents a different strand – one “User”, one “Land interest” and one “Other”. This year our Chairman, Vice Chairman and Deputy Chairman were each re-elected for another two year term.

The JLAF is supported by its Secretary, appointed and paid for jointly by the three Councils. The Secretary has an additional role as “Access Improvement Officer” for the three Councils. The JLAF Secretary has developed an outstanding website which we believe is used by other professionals. During the year the website has been re-vamped and is constantly updated. Readers of this Annual Report will find further information on www.jlaf.org.uk on all of the issues reported on below.

What We Did Last Year

1) Rights of Way Improvement Plan

The JLAF has always been closely involved with the Councils’ Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs) having contributed substantially to their development. We monitor and encourage implementation by the Councils and receive regular updates on progress.

1a) The Rights of Way Network

The year has seen the installation of the “CAMS” (Countryside Access Management System) computer system by the Councils. This is a public rights of way mapping database which records photographically both routes and “furniture” – stiles, gates etc. Associated with this has been a full network survey logging the state of the network. This should make it easier to identify and deal with problems. We are assured that a joint standards scheme will be adopted across the area. From an administrative point of view the JLAF has been kept informed of the introduction of common Path Order Policies which will give the public a clear route through the legalities of proposed changes to the network.

1b) A Database of Local Walks and Rides

The ROWIP proposal for an online database that will make it easier for the public to access the countryside has taken a big step forward this year. The Councils asked the JLAF to set up a working group to advise how this can be done. With the help of the JLAF Secretary work is well advanced on a template to record walks and equestrian rides. Other information and links to user groups will be included and it is planned that the service will be launched with the public in March 2011 under the domain name www.OutdoorsWest.org.uk.



2 Projects of Special Interest to the JLAF

The JLAF has been encouraging progress by Councils on a number of projects which it deems to be of importance to enjoyment of the outdoors. Such projects while not necessarily particularly expensive can be complex and depend for their success on a drive to overcome the difficulties.

2a) Riverside Paths in Bristol

We understand that progress is being made on firmly re-establishing the link from Bristol to the Severn Way which has fallen into disrepair. This requires works on the ground and the co-operation of Network Rail and the National Trust. Further to the east the JLAF is keen to see the status of the Monarch's Way through St Philip's Marsh legally established. This requires the co-operation of three commercial landowners, once again Network Rail are involved. Like British Rail we think that Bristol Council "are getting there". While Council staff have been patiently working away at these issues, yet further to the east the heavily promoted River Avon Trail at Conham has been falling into disrepair. We hope to see work on the strengthening of the river banks start soon.

2b) Lansdown near Bath

Longstanding issues over the use of a footpath and more recently of access land on Lansdown north of Bath have been resolved by path diversion and creation orders. Stirling work by the volunteers of the Cotswold Wardens have helped to produce a really excellent route along the ridge which links with the wider network. While thanks are due to Council staff and others, the JLAF believes it was itself instrumental in driving this issue to resolution.

2c) Path round Chew Valley Lake

Long standing efforts to extend and improve the paths on the north side of Chew Valley Lake have been mired in the complexity of the task. Bath and North East Somerset Council are responsible for granting planning permission and at least some of the financing. Sustrans have taken the lead in applying for planning permission and arranging the works. Natural England are concerned that the various habitats, especially grass lands and birds are protected. Last (but not least!) the landowners, Bristol Water, are supportive but need to protect water quality. During the year the JLAF has been liaising endlessly with the various players. Progress has been made but there is a fear that success is too late to avoid being affected by Local Authority expenditure cuts.

3 Consultations

The JLAF makes a point of responding to all public consultations within its remit despite the difficulties often experienced by short lead times. Such consultations fall within two categories, national and local. All our responses are viewable on the JLAF's website.

3a) Marine and Coastal Access Act

The final version of Natural England's Scheme for implementation of access to the coast was published during the year. This is a long document and there are many possible areas of contention. The JLAF's working group strove for consensus. The document talks repeatedly of the need for Natural England to consider the fair balance of the interests. This will be achieved locally rather than by fine words. The JLAF have an ongoing interest in coastal access. We have a small amount of coast, albeit on the Severn Estuary. Many of our members are keen that coastal access should continue as far as the Severn Bridge. This is not a foregone conclusion.



3b) The Long Term Role of the Public Forest Estate

The Forestry Commission were asking for views on the management of public forests including the cost, income generation, recreational use, planting types. We responded to those issues within our remit.

3c) Discovering Lost Ways

The Stakeholders Working Group on Public Rights of Way was rather oddly constituted by Defra. Its aim was to try to resolve issues regarding the twenty five year cut-off in CRoW 2000 for new claims for rights of way on grounds of historic usage. We had a limited opportunity to contribute before the final take-it-or-leave-it document was produced. We are disappointed that the final document is toothless.

3d) Ordnance Survey Free

This was a daunting technical document from Ordnance Survey as they tried to establish how they should establish free on-line access to various forms of mapping.

3e) Housing Development on the Urban Fringe

Many members of the JLAF have been concerned at the plans for housing development throughout the area, much of it on the green belt. The JLAF does not think it feasible, even if it were desirable, to comment on each of the local issues. However we do have a position statement on the importance of "green infrastructure" to any proposed developments. This was submitted to South Gloucestershire as part of their consultation.

3f) Bristol Walking Strategy

JLAF representatives attended consultation meetings held by Bristol City Council to help develop its Walking Strategy. Our input was made informally on those occasions.

4) Gating of Neighbourhood Paths

Under the Gating Orders of the Highways Act 1980 Local Authorities have the power to erect gates across public rights of way on grounds of anti-social behaviour or the fear of anti-social behaviour. Local Access Forums have to be informed of any such proposals. The JLAF accepts that there is a balance to be struck between the concerns of residents and the loss of amenity by the general public wishing to use such paths. We have produced a twelve point statement so that our Council's know what information we can reasonably expect to support a gating proposal. During the past year we have advised both South Gloucestershire and Bristol Councils against a gating order. We were disappointed that Bristol Council chose not to take our advice. In so doing we believe that they lost sight of the need for a fair balance in that particular case.

5) Joint Local Transport Plan

The Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP3) is in the process of being re-written for implementation from April 2011. ROWIPs will be integrated into the new plan. Our Chairman asked questions at the public meeting of the Joint Transport Executive in February and was subsequently invited to sit on the West of England Transport Plan Commission. The JLAF is strongly making the point that in the context of the Transport Plan, walking and cycling projects are cheap, efficient and sustainable and should therefore be given the highest priority. As budgets are squeezed by the economic situation this is exactly the right time for a change of direction.



6) Beyond the JLAF

Local Access Forums, including the JLAF were set up without an overarching organisation. Our Chairman has been instrumental in helping to set up a small body known as the England Access Forum that can talk directly to Natural England and Government at a national level. So far this has highlighted issues but the constant and continuing turmoil in Natural England does not augur well. Some support for LAFs has been forthcoming through Natural England at a Regional level. In the South West we have attended meetings of Chairmen and Secretaries and members have taken advantage of a conference/training event.

7) Access Land Restrictions

The JLAF has a statutory consultation role regarding restrictions that may be placed on access land. We have one such restriction in our area due to possible aggression from a specific breed of cattle when with calf. This was due for renewal during the year. We remain convinced of the need for this partial restriction.

8) Speakers at JLAF Meetings

We endeavour to get a short presentation by speakers at our meetings. We regard these talks as educational and informative as well as allowing for an exchange of views between members and our guest. This year we have been pleased to welcome:

- Amanda Grundy of Natural England explaining the role of NE regarding all aspects of access to the outdoors.
- James White from the West of England Partnership who told us about the background to and considerations guiding JLTP3 and
- Andrew Green of South Gloucestershire Council who dealt with the issues of building green infrastructure into the Council's Core Development Strategy.

9) Liaison with the Public Rights of Way Teams

The JLAF is pleased that members of the Councils' Public Rights of Way Teams continue to attend our meetings. While this is not the place for the detail of network management we can discuss wider issues with them. In return the JLAF sends a representative to the quarterly meetings of the Public Rights of Way Liaison Groups which keep open the lines of communication with all the user groups. In this respect we are greatly disappointed that Bath and North East Somerset has temporarily discontinued its Liaison Group due to a 35% cut in PROW staffing. We note that all the Public Rights of Way Departments are likely to come under increasing budgetary restraints.

The Future

As we present this Annual Report and Newsletter we are conscious that it will be read as national and local public expenditure is being cut. We would make the following points:

- We are here to champion access to the outdoors. In a time of stringency the public should be encouraged to take advantage of such access which is cheap, sustainable and supports mental and physical well-being in what might otherwise be a less uplifting time.
- The nineteen lay members of the JLAF are all volunteers. We think we represent the sort of community spirit now being called the "Big Society". We believe that sort of spirit is widespread but it needs to be tapped and in the early stages guided if it is partially to replace what Local Authorities might otherwise do.



Secretary's Report

JLAF Members	Interest Category	Description	Attendance at Meetings		
			18	19	20
Ray Newbigin	Other	Chairman of the JLAF (Vice Chair 2003-2006, Chairman NOV06-JUL12) Keen to increase the demand for outdoor recreation and is now Chairman of the JLAF.	✓	✓	✓
Robin Winfield	User	Vice Chairman of the JLAF (NOV06-JUL08, JUL08-JUL12) Previously NFU Group Secretary and sat on the South Gloucestershire ROW Liaison Group and now Vice Chairman of the JLAF.	✓	✓	✓
Ron Phelps	Landowning	Deputy Chairman of the JLAF (NOV06-JUL08, JUL08-JUL12) Avon Area Access Officer for the local Ramblers' Association and is now the Deputy Chairman of the JLAF.	✓	✓	✓
Councillor Chris Cray	Nominated as a JLAF Member by Bath & North East Somerset Council.		✓	-	-
Councillor Trevor Blythe	Nominated as a JLAF Member by Bristol City Council.		-	-	-
Councillor Malcolm Bridge	Nominated as a JLAF Member by South Gloucestershire Council.		-	✓	✓
Janine Averis	Landowning	A landowner, keen horse rider and dog walker who wants quality, accessible routes away from roads.	-	-	-
Chris Bloor	User	A walker and runner, enthusiastic about leisure pedestrian routes and has published books of circular routes linking to the Community Forest Path. South Gloucestershire Local Correspondent to the Open Spaces Society.	✓	✓	✓
Jill Britten	Landowning	Has farmed countryside on the southern edge of Bristol for 40 years, enjoys seeing responsible users and encourages the conservation of nature.	✓	-	✓
Bill Dawson	User	Drives a pony and trap and participates in Driving for the Disabled.	-	✓	✓
Ann Fay	User	The local British Horse Society (BHS) Access and Bridleways Officer for South Gloucestershire and Bristol and works with people with disabilities.	✓	✓	✓
Anna Ferguson	Other	Passionate about encouraging access to the outdoors for health and to socially excluded groups. An interest in the conservation of amphibians and reptiles, and Chair of Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group.	-	-	-
Roger Fowler	User	User in most categories, landowner with Public Rights of Way on his land and a member of the TRF (Trail Riders Fellowship).	-	✓	✓
Peter Gould	User	Bristol Area Footpath Secretary for the Ramblers' Association and author of publications about exploring the countryside.	✓	✓	✓
John Gunnery	Landowning	Landowner, farmer who provides Toll Rides for horses and member of the CLA (Country, Land and Business Association).	✓	-	-
Robert Killen	Landowning	A Chartered Surveyor and Land Agent for two estates in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.	✓	-	✓
Colette Linehan	User	A regular commuting & leisure walker and cyclist who would like to make these activities more accessible: "many youngsters especially, do not have the freedom to explore their world that even my generation benefited from and I passionately believe that this is a trend that rapidly needs reversing".	-	-	-
Bernadette Macey	User	A volunteer Health Walk leader in Bath. Enjoys walking for pleasure and to get around.	✓	✓	✓
Andrew Short	User	Active cyclist and walker. Interested in promoting commuting and leisure cycling and related safety issues.	-	-	-
Adam Stratton	Landowning	A farmer with land in the Forest of Avon and much of this land is in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.	-	-	-
David Waterstone	Other	The Chairman for the Avon Area of the Ramblers Association, active with the Cotswold AONB Voluntary Wardens.	✓	✓	-
Margaret Wilson	Landowning	A farmer and founder member of the Chew Valley Recreational Trail Association.	-	✓	✓



JLAF Observers

There are a number of observers of the JLAF. These are bodies or individuals that are invited to the JLAF meetings, who can provide information to the JLAF or receive advice from the JLAF. These include a member of the executive of each council, secretaries of adjacent Local Access Forums and government and agency contacts.

JLAF Website

A JLAF website has been maintained at www.jlaf.org.uk, now with frequent updates of news of interest to members and others. Papers for all of the meetings of the JLAF are available from the secretary and on the JLAF website. The website includes all meeting papers of the JLAF, documents produced by the JLAF and other information that relates to the work of the JLAF.

JLAF Work Programme 2010/11

The JLAF has a statutory interest in the following areas of work:

Access Land

Following the new right coming into force in December 2004, the JLAF maintains a statutory interest, for example in considering applications for restrictions on access land. The JLAF will wish to review work on access land in its area as the 10 year review of access land mapping approaches, and the implementation of coastal access rights introduced by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)

The JLAF is a statutory consultee for Rights of Way Improvement Plans. The JLAF has an interest in ensuring the Councils implement this plan effectively. The JLAF wishes to ensure that the Councils increase demand for use of Public Rights of Way, so increasing the number of people using the network. The JLAF expect to be very involved in the OutdoorsWest project, including advising on contents and the inclusion of routes on the website. The JLAF would also like to see the information held on the website distributed to those without access to the internet.

In addition, the JLAF is keen to liaise closely with authorities, ensuring effective management and promotion of Public Rights of Way and any related subjects, including planning, stimulating demand and to promote the significant benefits that this can bring. The three Councils are currently developing Core Strategies under the Local Development Frameworks, and Green Infrastructure Policies, which are key to the improvement of outdoors access in this area.



JLAF Forward Programme 2010 / 2011

The table on the following page shows meetings proposed for 2010-11. This does not include any additional meetings including sub-groups that might be arranged.

Meeting	Date
JLAF22 Main Meeting	FR 05NOV10
JLAF23 Main Meeting	FR 04MAR11
JLAF24 Main Meeting	FR 01JUL11

This is a report on the seventh year of the Joint Local Access Forum for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire (the JLAF). This report fulfils the requirements of paragraph 13 of The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007.

Further information about the JLAF is available on the JLAF website at:

www.jlaf.org.uk

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