

Joint Local Access Forum

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



WORK PLAN 2018

Introduction

1 The Joint Local Access Forum for the City of Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire is set up under sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and regulations made in 2007 under that Act. Under Regulation 6 the Forum is an independent body whose proceedings are entirely under its own discretion¹. The unitary authorities for its area (the “appointing authorities”) must under Regulations 3 to 5 make appointments to the Forum, under Regulation 11 employ a secretary for the Forum, and under Regulation 12 meet any reasonable expenses incurred by the Forum or its members. The Forum is obliged under section 94(6) to have regard to guidance given by the Secretary of State in 2007. The task of the Forum is to give advice to the highway authorities, parish councils and the Cotswolds Conservation Board² on the improvement of access by the public to land in rural and in some circumstances in urban areas; those bodies are obliged to have regard to such advice in carrying out their functions.

2 According to Government guidance “It is strongly recommended that forums prepare a forward work programme which sets out the forum’s priorities and special areas of interest. This can play an important role in helping to ensure that the forum focuses on issues which are the most relevant for the area and clarify the issues on which the appointing authorities or other section 94(4) bodies would benefit from receiving advice”³. This document is such a forward work programme.

An ambition for focus

3 As the Guidance adds, “forum members are volunteers and many will be giving their time and experience freely. There will be a limit on the amount of time which forum members are able, or prepared, to devote to this work, and it will be important for forums to ensure that their workload is manageable. At the same time forum members will be keen to ensure that their time and experience is utilised to maximum effect.”⁴. We are also keenly aware of the fact that in these days of austerity our appointing authorities are rightly jealous even of the negligible resources required to support the JLAF’s work.

4 We are therefore determined to prioritise our work ruthlessly. When members of the public contact members of the JLAF, it is often with concerns about

¹ See *Guidance on Local Access Forums in England* issued by the Secretary of State §6.1.5.

² These are known as the “section 94(4) bodies”.

³ See *Guidance* §4.1.1.

⁴ See *Guidance* §3.8.1.



individual rights of way. These enquiries can highlight problems in our area and form a useful source of intelligence for our work. They can also draw attention to precedents which suggest difficulties or resolutions with wider application. But there are other mechanisms for the resolution of such issues, and it is important that they do not distract us from the JLAF's strategic role at a time of such limited resources. We shall therefore over the next year set up a committee to which such work can be delegated. We would expect that in the future it would be only the wider lessons to be learned which would come to the JLAF itself.

An ambition for meeting needs

5 The role of the JLAF is to give advice to the section 94(4) bodies on improvements to public access. Our membership is drawn from a wide range of relevant professions and backgrounds, and gives us an *entrée* into many networks both locally and nationally. This fact in itself enables us to identify many of the needs we are here to address. But we need to search out other needs as well, and if we are to make the best of our value to the community we must be clear that we are meeting the priorities of the section 94(4) bodies which have such a powerful influence over access issues. Within the appointing authorities we are familiar to the public rights of way teams but little known outside them, while to other organisations we are largely invisible. If our time and the public resources we use are to be put to good effect, this must change. We shall press the appointing authorities to ensure that we are adequately resourced to pull our weight effectively in contributing to their own goals.

Overall priorities

6 The Government's guidance emphasises the role of LAFs in development planning⁵. The latest rounds of the development plan process in the City of Bristol and in Bath & North East Somerset have recently been completed. However, it will be important for us to continue to contribute well and constructively to the JSP and the JLTP, following up the advice we offered in December 2016, and to continue to engage with the South Gloucestershire processes in relation to the new Core Strategy and the Policies Sites and Places PDP.

7 Following the creation of a new West of England Combined Authority and the election of Tim Bowles as West of England Mayor, there will be something of a reset both in the JSP process and in the LEP. We are commenting on the West of England Strategy Discussion Paper published in July 2017, and will keep closely in touch with developments. A particular priority will be the need for a long-term pedestrian network plan, especially in the context of the need for substantial new housing developments and for transport corridor improvements; and this needs to be properly linked with ambitious proposals for cycling and other modes of access.

⁵ See *Guidance*, Annex A §§14, 26-29.



Special priorities

8 In our local circumstances, however, we believe that there are two other issues which are achieving at least equal prominence and to which we should give particular focus: *health* and *tourism*.

Health

9 In relation to health, there is a growing recognition of the adverse effects of modern lifestyles on health, especially through increased time pressures and longer journeys to work and shop, which encouraged more use of cars and less exercise. The impact on health budgets is already severe and worsening, but noisy fume-filled streets are at the same time a deterrent to walking. Public access has a big potential for contributing to the resolution of these issues, whether by means of recreational footpaths and bridleways in attractive rural surroundings, or through convenient and practical dedicated pathways and cycleways on urban routes.

10 The September 2017 meeting of the City of Bristol Health and Wellbeing Board considered a report on changes to the lifestyle behaviours of Bristol residents by means of a contract budgeted at around £1.6m. The second policy in Priority Theme 1 of the South Gloucestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to “support people to build everyday activity into their lives through walking, cycling and the continued provision of active leisure opportunities”. Priority 4 of Theme 1 of the Bath & North East Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy is “a built and natural environment which supports and enables people in our communities to lead healthy and sustainable lives, measured *inter alia* by rates of cycling and walking and access to high quality open and green spaces”. The Bath & North East Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group is currently considering a new approach to hip and knee replacements, where obese patients would be encouraged to lose weight in an attempt to improve the likelihood of the operation being successful; exercise would inevitably have a place in such an initiative.

11 The JLAF Chair has already had a preliminary meeting with the Chair of the Bath and North East Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board, and has been received with interest. He will pursue contacts also with the Health and Wellbeing Boards of the City of Bristol and of South Gloucestershire. The JLAF has discussed the prescription walks initiative in Stroud, as well as a current lack of focus on improving urban footpath routes. *Walking for Health* will be approached.

Tourism

12 In relation to tourism, recognition of the huge annual economic value of tourism to the West of England area is growing, albeit slowly. Already it involves 3 million overnight tourist visits, 28 million day visitors, £1.8 billion of expenditure by tourists, a direct GVA of £0.95 billion, and 55,000 people employed.

13 One of the recognised problems in this field is that tourists often spend only a few hours in the West of England before going elsewhere. The 2015 West of England Tourism Development Plan claims “although the main marketing focus



will remain on the urban centres, there is potential to develop and exploit the linkages between the urban areas and the nearby countryside which can add value and encourage extended stays.”⁶. The B&NES Destination Management Plan for Bath notes “the surrounding countryside has its own appeal as an attractive place to visit....This rich hinterland adds significantly to the visitor offer.” – but has admitted that “movement between the city and the rural areas is problematic”⁷, and the Destination Marketing Strategy for Bath and North East Somerset 2012-14 includes a target to grow the number of visitor nights spent in Bath by 10%⁸. The English countryside is world-famous, and the acknowledged beauty of the Cotswolds and Mendip AONBs occupies much of the West of England rural area. If tourists could be induced to take a little more time to exercise and enjoy this countryside, it would increase both their own enjoyment of their visit, and the contribution they make to the local economy and to employment.

14 Many issues are relevant, from advertising to bus routes (including the question “How do I get back?”); the *Mendip Explorer* service may offer lessons, and there may well be a gap in co-ordination in this area which the JLAF could fill. The current remodelling of the LEP and its Visitor Economy Sector Group may well create an opportunity for a useful contribution by the JLAF, and the wider West of England Combined Authority and Mayor may also be involved.

Conclusion

15 The JLAF therefore intends to prioritise its efforts in 2018 on development planning, health and tourism issues. A more detailed implementation plan, having regard to the resources available, will be developed and appended to this plan once the broad policy is agreed.

Mark O’Sullivan

Chair, JLAF

Keynsham

3 November 2017

⁶ West of England Tourism Development Plan, Executive Summary p. 3.

⁷ B&NES Destination Management Plan for Bath p. 23.

⁸ See <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/local-research-and-statistics/wiki/tourism-and-visitor-economy>.