

Local Access Forums (LAFs) (England and Wales)

THIS BRIEFING COVERS

- Headline messages
- CTC view
- Key facts and arguments (membership and remit of LAFs, cycling objectives, cycling representation)
- Priority aims and actions

HEADLINE MESSAGES

- Local Access Forums (LAFs) should aim to maximise the benefits of the Rights of Way (RoW) network for both recreational and day-to-day travel.
- LAFs should include representation of cyclists' interests to ensure that the network is developed, maintained and promoted accordingly.

CTC VIEW

- Cycling interests should be represented on all LAFs.
- Local authorities should be receptive and responsive to LAF recommendations on:
 - amendments to the definitive map¹ and on processing them in a timely fashion, to the benefit of off-road cycling
 - the promotion and signing of the RoW network and other opportunities for off-road cycling
 - the proper maintenance of byways, bridleways and un-surfaced unclassified roads
 - the removal of obstructions.
- LAFs should promote off-road cycling as a healthy and enjoyable activity, particularly to families and young people.
- LAFs should adopt, implement and promote CTC's key *Rights of Way Improvement Plan* (RoWIP) priorities (see CTC's Campaigns Briefing on RoWIPs).



KEY FACTS AND ARGUMENTS

1) Background

- The Government was keen to encourage local people to engage with local authorities on implementing the open access provisions of the *Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW Act 2000²)*. To facilitate this the Act made Local Access Forums (LAFs) mandatory.
- Forums include recreational users, landowners and other interests such as tourism.
- People with an interest in one or more of these topics are invited and nominated by the local authority to represent these interests.
- A member is not allowed to represent an organisation, but should be able to represent his / her particular interests knowledgeably.
- Through the Forum, members advise local authorities on the promotion and management of Open Access (walkers only), and Public Rights of Way (PRoW), including Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) for all users.
- In May 2009, the then minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs, wrote to all LAFs and Chief Executives of every English local authority, confirming government commitment to the continuing success of LAFs.³
- Regional coordination is now being supported by Natural England to facilitate networking, the dissemination of information useful to LAF members and uptake of a dedicated, interactive website for LAF members.

2) Representing cycling interests on LAFs

CTC view: Cycling interests should be represented on all LAFs

Local authorities differ widely in their support of LAFs. Many are very supportive, but some perform their Public Rights of Way duties poorly, only paying lip service to working with their LAF. In these situations, the best advice is for people with cycling interests to engage with elected members to try to bring about change.

- CTC encourages anyone with an interest in cycling to represent off-road cycling needs on their LAF either as members, or as contributing members of the public.
- Where a LAF does not have cycling representation, CTC encourages local cyclists to attend meetings with the aim of positively influencing local authority policy to benefit off-road cyclists.



3) Cycling objectives for LAFs

CTC view:

- Local authorities should be receptive and responsive to LAF recommendations on:
 - amendments to the definitive map¹ and on processing them in a timely fashion, to the benefit of off-road cyclists
 - the promotion and signing of the RoW network and other opportunities for off-road cycling
 - the proper maintenance of byways, bridleways and un-surfaced unclassified roads
 - the removal of obstructions
- LAFs should promote off-road cycling as a healthy and enjoyable activity, particularly to families and young people.

LAFs are in a good position to boost cycling in their areas by, for example, engaging in:

- **The promotion of cycling as a beneficial activity:** government policy recognises the importance of cycling for recreational purposes and for its positive influence on good health and wellbeing. For instance, young people who are uninterested in other recreational pursuits may well enjoy mountain biking, so improving opportunities for off-road cycling will help encourage them to take up a beneficial physical activity for fun.
- **Providing motor traffic-free routes:** families especially often prefer to cycle together in a motor traffic-free environment, but it can be difficult for them to identify somewhere to ride.
- **The upkeep and promotion of RoW:** the byway and bridleway network has not realised its full potential as a useable and well-known resource for off-road cycling because it is often poorly maintained, promoted and publicised.

ADVICE FOR CYCLISTS and CYCLING REPRESENTATIVES

- **Local cyclists who wish to influence their LAF are advised to:**
 - Get involved with the local PRow officer by reporting obstructions and inadequate signing or waymarking of bridleways and byways.
 - Look up the LAF and RoWIP pages on their local authority's website to find out about future meetings, the minutes of previous meetings and aspirations for the future.
 - Read CTC's RoWIP priorities and present a case for one of them at a future LAF meeting:
www.ctc.org.uk/campaigning/views-and-briefings/rights-of-way-improvement-plans-england-wales
- **When introducing a cycling-related topic at a LAF meeting:**
 - Research the topic thoroughly.
 - Discuss beforehand with the LAF's chair.
 - If appropriate, liaise with the equestrian representative (bridleways).
 - Have a summary paper to hand out at the meeting and as an attachment to the minutes.
 - Be firm, but polite. Not all members will favour cycling initiatives.
 - Try to commit the LAF to an action point for the local authority to consider.



FURTHER READING

- CTC campaigns briefing *Rights of Way Improvement Plans*:
www.ctc.org.uk/campaigning/views-and-briefings/rights-of-way-improvement-plans-england-wales
- Natural England Rights of Way web page:
www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/rightsofway/default.aspx.
- Natural England LAF web page:
www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/laf/default.aspx

REFERENCES

¹ The definitive map is a statutory document that must be produced and kept up to date by every county council or unitary authority (except Inner London Boroughs). Every single right of way in an authority's area should be recorded on it. The map can be modified via Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs), as long as there is evidence to support the application.

² *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000*. Part II. Public Rights of Way & Road Traffic
www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000037_en_1 P60 *Rights of Way Improvement Plans*; P94 *Local Access Forums*

³ Letter from Huw Irranca-Davies MP Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs, 28/5/2009 to all LAFs in England. <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/countryside/crow/20090528laf-letter.pdf>