

## Local Access Forums (LAFs) (England and Wales)

### THIS BRIEFING COVERS

Membership and remit of LAFs; cycling objectives; cycling representation; priority aims and actions

### HEADLINE MESSAGES

- Effective Local Access Forums (LAFs) can help improve the Rights of Way (RoW) network for both recreational and day-to-day travel.
- With cyclists' interests represented on them, LAFs can also help make sure that the network is developed, maintained and promoted with cycling in mind. Local people and visitors can then enjoy a wider range of motor traffic-free, accessible routes in the countryside, and keep fit at the same time.

### KEY FACTS

- Local Highway Authorities and National Parks have to set up Local Access Forums by law under the *Countryside & Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000*. Members are not allowed to represent an organisation, but should be able to represent their interests knowledgeably.
- In 2014/15, there were 86 active LAFs in England, with almost a thousand members between them. Around 24 LAFs are operating in Wales.
- In 2014/15, English LAFs were formally consulted on 100 "route improvements (to PROW and other multi-user/cycling/horse-riding/walking routes)", and were asked for advice on another 140 of them.

### Cycling UK VIEW

- Cycling interests should be represented on all LAFs.
- Local authorities should be receptive and responsive to LAF recommendations on:
  - amendments to the definitive map<sup>1</sup> and on processing them in a timely fashion, to the benefit of off-road cycling;
  - promoting and signing of the RoW network and other opportunities for off-road cycling;
  - the proper maintenance of byways, bridleways and un-surfaced unclassified roads;
  - removing 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 Cycling UK's key *Rights of Way Improvement Plan* (RoWIP) priorities (see Cycling UK's Campaigns Briefing on RoWIPs).



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 1. Context

- LAFs advise local authorities and national park authorities on improving public access for outdoor recreation and sustainable travel in their area. They cover, for example, the promotion and management of open access for walkers and, for all users, public rights of way and Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs).
- The local authority invites and nominates local people to become members. They must ensure that the forum represents the local community with a reasonable balance of interests, i.e. rights of way users (e.g. walkers, horse riders and cyclists); land owners and occupiers; and people from relevant sectors (e.g. tourism, conservation, health etc.).
- Making LAFs mandatory was the Government's way of ensuring that local people had the best chance to get involved with their council's work on the *Countryside & Rights of Way (CRoW) Act's 2000* access provisions.<sup>2</sup>
- A member is not allowed to represent an organisation, but should be able to represent his / her particular interests knowledgeably.
- LAFs are currently coordinated by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.
- In 2014/15, there were 86 active LAFs in England, with 959 members between them.<sup>3</sup> There are around 24 LAFs operating in Wales.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Representing cycling interests on LAFs

**Cycling UK view:** Cycling interests should be represented on all LAFs

Local authority support for LAFs differs widely. While many are very supportive, others perform their public rights of way duties poorly and only pay lip service to working with their LAF.

To get the best out of all LAFs for cycling, Cycling UK encourages anyone with an interest in cycling to become a formal member of their LAF, or influence its direction by going to their meetings as members of the public, or contributing in other ways.





### 3. Cycling objectives for LAFs

#### Cycling UK view:

- Local authorities should be receptive and responsive to LAF recommendations on:
  - amendments to the definitive map<sup>1</sup> 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 finding somewhere suitable to ride can be a problem.
- **The upkeep and promotion of RoW:** the byway and bridleway network is, potentially, an invaluable resource for off-road cycling. Unfortunately, poor maintenance along some sections, together with lack of promotion and publicity, means that it's underused.

#### Progress to date

According to the annual reviews that around 82% of the LAFs in England submitted for 2014/15, they were formally consulted on 100 "route improvements (to PROW and other multi-user/cycling/horse-riding/walking routes)", and were asked for advice on another 140 of them.<sup>5</sup>





## ADVICE FOR CYCLISTS and CYCLING REPRESENTATIVES

- **Local cyclists who wish to influence their LAF are advised to:**
  - Look up the LAF and RoWIP pages on their local authority's website to find out about future meetings, the minutes of previous meetings, the process of becoming a formal member, and the Forum's aspirations for the future.
  - Present the case for cycling at a future LAF meeting. See our briefing on Rights of Way Improvement Plans for suggestions on what to prioritise:  
[www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/rights-of-way-improvement-plans-england-wales](http://www.cyclinguk.org/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 (who'll be interested in bridleways).
  - Produce a summary paper to hand out at the meeting and to be attached to the minutes.
  - Be firm, but polite. Not all members will be sympathetic to cycling initiatives.
  - Try to commit the LAF to an action point for the local authority to consider.

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## FURTHER READING

- Cycling UK campaigns briefing *Rights of Way Improvement Plans*:  
[www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/rights-of-way-improvement-plans-england-wales](http://www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/rights-of-way-improvement-plans-england-wales)

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## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000*. Part II. Public Rights of Way & Road Traffic  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents) (s60 for *Rights of Way Improvement Plans*; s94 for *Local Access Forums*)
- <sup>3</sup> Natural England. *Local Access Forum: Annual Report – April 2014 to March 2015*. Feb 2016.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-access-forums-annual-reports>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.naturalresources.wales/days-out/recreation-and-access-policy-advice-and-guidance/networks-and-partnerships/local-access-forums/?lang=en>
- <sup>5</sup> Natural England. *Local Access Forum: Annual Report – April 2014 to March 2015*. Feb 2016.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-access-forums-annual-reports>