

ROTHERHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM



**Annual Report
2006 – 2007**



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1. Chairman's Introduction

The 'highlight' of 2006 was undoubtedly the adoption of the final version of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for the borough. National legislation requires every highway authority to produce a ROWIP, but that same legislation does not require the authority to fund or implement its findings. Therein lies a fundamental weakness in the whole process, and one which is now giving rise to increasing concern amongst Local Access Forum's (LAFs) up and down the country. We share the concerns expressed by several LAF chairmen in correspondence with the Minister in Whitehall and remain unconvinced by the answers given in return.

At a local level, I attended the council committee meeting which adopted the ROWIP, and I urged councillors to engage the LAF in helping officers to implement its recommendations. Despite the support and encouragement of local members, no borough councillors attended the forum during the reporting period.

Part of this problem of lack of engagement is due to our failure as yet to raise the profile of what the LAF does and why. The words 'light' and 'bushel' spring to mind. The LAF will need to spend more of its time during the coming year in looking at how to publicise who we are and what we do and why the people of the borough should show an interest in our work. Sometimes we forget that access to the countryside is not a priority for many people in the borough, particularly those on low incomes, the elderly, disabled or from ethnic minority groups who struggle with many other day to day problems. We need to get the message over that enhanced access to local countryside has a positive role to play in addressing transport, health and other social issues and thus investing money in improving the infrastructure produces a positive return.

The work of the LAF is varied and always ongoing. During the year, several members came together as a 'River and Canal Corridor Access' sub-group to look at the borough's network of waterways and how we enhance access to them. In theory, such 'corridors' offer great potential benefits to local people because they are usually level. Therefore people with mobility problems can benefit from enhanced facilities. The multiplicity of landowners involved is a headache, but the potential for gain is large and is an area the LAF must pursue in the near future. On the 'down' side, news of serious cuts in the budget and staffing levels at British Waterways does not bode well for the future if we are looking for improvements and partnership working.

Another area in which we need to step up our involvement is networking with adjacent LAFs. We share common boundaries with five other local authorities each of who has a LAF and a ROWIP in various stages of development. Walkers, cyclists and horse riders pay little heed to which side of a boundary they are on whilst out and about and to some extent we think along similar lines. Parochialism must not inhibit us in our thinking. As Chairman, I recently attended a meeting of the neighbouring Nottinghamshire LAF at Shireoaks and found it a very useful exercise.

In conclusion, 2006 was a year when we reached our goal of helping to develop a working ROWIP and made a start on implementing some of its recommendations. Now we need to carry that work forward and simultaneously raise our profile in the borough so that people can see what and why we are doing this work on their behalf. We need to

network more in the 'corridors of power' and to take music lessons of 'blowing our own trumpets'. The next year or two will be busy ones, but we hope profitable ones.

John Harker
Chairman of the
Rotherham Local Access Forum

2. Legal Framework

- 2.1 The establishment of a Local Access Forum is a statutory requirement of Section 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- 2.2 Rotherham Local Access Forum operates in accordance with the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007.
- 2.3 Local Access Forums have the primary purpose of giving advice on the improvement of public access to the land in the Council's jurisdiction for the purpose of open air-recreation and enjoyment of the area, and as to such other matters as may be prescribed.

3. Membership

- 3.1 The forum members are volunteers drawn from a variety of local groups of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and disabled groups as well as farmers, landowners, and representatives of other relevant local interest groups. The membership is balanced to avoid dominance by any single interest group or coalition of like interests.
- 3.2 The Local Access Forum currently has 11 members. Each year a third of the membership is available for re-selection. 3 forum members resigned during the course of reporting period.
- 3.3 The members of the Rotherham Local Access Forum are;

Name	Area of Interest	Interest Detail	Date of Appointment	End of Term
Ken Whetter	User	Walking	May 2003	June 2008
Vince Boulter	User	Horse riding and cycling	May 2003	Resigned
Lindy Stevenson	Land Manager	Wentworth Parish Council	Feb 2004	June 2008
John Harker (Chairman)	User/ Conservation	Walking and conservation volunteer	May 2003	June 2007
Muir Mennell	User	Horse rider and motorcyclist	May 2003	June 2008
Rachel Hobson	Land Manager	Farmer and Horse rider	May 2003	June 2008
Alan Turton	User	Horse rider and carriage	May 2003	June 2007

		driver		
Peter Cogill (Vice Chair)	Conservation	Conservation	May 2003	June 2008
Tony Sarjeant	Transportation	RMBC Transportation Unit and jogger	May 2003	June 2007
John Clarke	User	Recreational motorist	Feb 2004	Resigned
Counc. Jeb Nightingale	Appointed as elected member	Walker	Feb 2004	Resigned
Richard Brooke	Land Manager	Farmer	May 2005	May 2008
Richard Swann	Parish Council	Walking	Feb 2006	Feb 2009
Eric Stowe	Disabled Access Officer	Disabled Access	Feb 2006	Feb 2009

4. Forum Meetings

4.1 Four forum meetings have been held during the course of the reporting period at the following venues:

Herringthorpe United Reformed Church	Monday 12 June 06
The Wesley Centre, Maltby	Monday 25 September 06
Wentworth Mechanics Institute	Tuesday 21 November 06
Herringthorpe United Reformed Church	Wednesday 31 January 07

4.2 All Local Access Forum information including meeting dates and minutes are available on the Rotherham Borough Council Web Site at

www.rotherham.gov.uk/prow

4.3 Members of the public are welcome to attend and observe local access forum meetings. Members of the public, user groups and other interested parties who wish to raise items for consideration by the local access forum may do so by contacting the Secretary.

4.4 The following individuals have attended the forum on an informal basis during 2006/ 2007:

Steven Hird – Peak & Northern Footpaths Society
Anthony Barber-Lomax Fitzwilliam (Wentworth) Estates

- 4.5 The average attendance rate of local access forum members is 53%.
- 4.6 2 speakers provided presentations during the reporting period.
- 'The Management of Rotherham's Woodland Estate'
Ian Kennedy, Woodlands Officer, Streetpride Service, Rotherham MBC
 - 'Access For All'
Eric Stowe, Access Officer, Asset Management Service, Rotherham MBC
- 4.7 No training events were held during the reporting period.
- 4.8 The forum received no feedback from Section 94(4) bodies.

5. The Work of the Forum

5.1 Rights of Way Improvement Plan

The Rotherham Rights of Way Improvement Plan was published in November 2006.

Rotherham's Rights of Way Improvement Plan aims to;

- Provide a rights of way network which is correctly recorded, easy to follow, free from obstruction and safe to use.
- Develop a network which meets the needs of local users and visitors to the borough whilst retaining the character of the countryside.
- Make the most of access opportunities to enable the network to be accessed by the widest possible audience, with particular regard to those with mobility problems.
- Increase opportunities for sustainable travel, for leisure and access to work, school and local services.
- Ensure that proposals and schemes are prioritised and implemented to meet the needs and aspirations of the population to deliver maximum benefit within available resources.
- Promote and encourage respect and understanding between path users and occupiers in order to minimise conflict.

The forum has played an important role in the preparation and production of Rotherham's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The forum will continue to play a central role in the implementation of public access improvements.

5.2 2006/ 2007 Access Improvement Works

The rights of way team again allocated £20,000 of the annual budget to the Local Access Forum to spend on countryside access improvements.

The forum members initially struggled to identify appropriate projects. Members were eager to implement schemes which would create additional access opportunities. However, the short timescale and limited resources ruled out a number of schemes. As a result, several projects were selected which addressed short falls in current access provision. Whilst the forum was disappointed that additional access could not be created, notable improvements have now been made to existing access.

The forum's budget allocation was spent on;

- The replacement of 32 public rights of way signs. Each sign has been fitted with a 'Funded by Rotherham LAF' sticker.
- The improvement of the public rights of way network in the Barrow area of Wentworth, including the replacement of path furniture, signage and way marking.
- The replacement of horse stiles in the vicinity of Keppel's Field.
- The replacement of a bridge on the Rotherham Round walk in Herringthorpe Woods.
- Improvement works on the permissive bridleway extending from Wentworth to Thorpe Hesley, including resurfacing works, replacement of path furniture and the replacement of a bridge.

5.3 River & Canal Corridor Access Survey

The River and Canal Access Survey sub group carried out an extensive survey of access to the borough's canals and rivers. This involved surveying the public access beside the Chesterfield Canal, the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation and the Dearne and Dove Canal. The group made a number of suggestions regarding the improvement and development of the river and canal corridors, in particularly improvements to the Chesterfield Canal at Thorpe Salvin and the South Yorkshire Navigation close to Rotherham Town Centre.

The findings of the group are now being used in the implementation of two ROWIP key actions;

1. The development and promotion of the Cuckoo Way and community link paths,
2. The implementation of a feasibility study to enable the creation of additional linear access beside the River Rother from Rotherham Town Centre to Rother Valley Country Park.

5.3 Other Discussions

The forum also discussed a variety of other subjects including;

- DEFRA Consultation – England's, Trees, Woodlands and Forests
- Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006
- Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2006
- Rotherham MBC, Planning & Transportation Service Consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Option – Giving new Planning Policy Directions for Rotherham
- Throapham Common Access Improvement Works

6. How to get Involved

For more information about the Rotherham Local Access Forum and how to get involved contact the Rotherham Local Access Forum Secretariat

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