

ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM - CONSTITUTION

Its purpose is to:

- provide balanced views and feedback to Natural England about all relevant access matters;
- exchange information;
- co-ordinate effective joint lobbying across Government;
- provide accurate information on policy initiatives and feedback on their implications and implementation; and
- to exchange best practice.

It will be organised as follows:

- the forum will meet three times per year, March/April, October/November and one other, normally in the summer;
- there will be 16 Local Access Forum (LAF) representatives, two from each region, and a smaller number of Natural England representatives comprising an Executive Director and senior colleagues sufficient to provide support, advice and expertise;
- decisions or recommendations made by the Forum will not be attributable to Natural England or binding on it;
- the process for nomination of LAF representatives is to be agreed within each region;
- The term of office for all individuals will be up to three years, but not exceeding their period of office as an individual member of a LAF;
- the Chair will be appointed from the LAF representatives;
- venues will be in Natural England offices around the country;
- the secretariat will be provided by Natural England who will liaise with the Chair. Papers can come from either the LAFs or Natural England;
- communication between LAFs and the forum will be through LAF Regional Co-ordinators who will be involved in raising agenda items, disseminating papers, etc;
- Natural England will reimburse travel expenses according to its transport and subsistence policies; i.e. travel by sustainable means on public transport at standard rates. A simple mechanism for claiming expenses will be used;
- appropriate liaison will be fostered with equivalent UK and European bodies.

The value of LAF volunteer time and additional professional support that the LAF representatives can draw on is recognised as a vital contribution to the Forum.

Additional points

- the Forum must be a constructive partnership not an occasion for LAFs simply to hold Natural England to account The emphasis is on understanding and working together;
- LAF representatives will not be mandated delegates;

- there can be substitution for LAF representatives but every effort should be made to ensure continuity;
- each LAF region is free to determine how its two members are chosen;
- opportunities for regional development and inter-regional liaison will be encouraged;
- LAF regions will be encouraged to submit agenda items drawn from LAFs and to discuss agenda items prior to meetings. LAF Regional Co-ordinators have a key role to play in this and in disseminating ourcomes.
- A Working Group will progress business between meetings as described in Annex 1.

Annex 1 The Working Group

Background

- At the 'meeting after the meeting' on 15th May it was unanimously agreed that a group be set up to support the Chair in managing the business of EAF and in dealing with matters arising between meetings, with a report on matters requiring ratification to the next full meeting.
- Nominations were sought and it was remitted to the Chair to secure the best balance reflecting different interest, expertise and geographical spread. The proposed group of five with two reserves was submitted to all EAF members and approved.

Developments.

- EAF members agreed subsequent to the May meeting that the Chair should seek a meeting with NE to clarify issues which had arisen. This took place on 27th June. Matthew Balfour and the Chair met in Sheffield with James Marsden and Ciaran Gannon. The Minute was circulated widely and was submitted to and welcomed by EAF members.

NE committed to

- support and maintain EAF as an effective national representative forum for LAFs to engage with and advise Natural England on this basis;
- develop a 2 year forward programme of policy development and delivery issues (e.g. draft report of National Trails review) on which we wish to consult and be advised by EAF.

EAF LAF members committed to

- establish a sub-group of 4-5 of its members (DG to inform us of the names) to ensure quick turnaround of consultations/requests for advice from Natural England between meetings of EAF as a whole;

- acknowledge that NE will wish to consult/seek advice on documents which are 'works in progress' and this implies a need for mutual trust and confidence that such documents will be treated on a “this is what we are minded to say/do, what do you think?” basis.

James Marsden undertook to consult with the group at the earliest stages of policy consultation without prejudicing the freedom of either party at later stages of consultation. The need for confidentiality was emphasised for obvious reasons.

NE subsequently invited comments from the group on the first draft of the Recreation Policy and this was given in the shape of a consolidated document very much reflecting practical grass-roots experience, James Marsden described the report as 'very helpful' appreciating the quick turnaround required and met.

When items were being considered for the September 23rd Meeting, it quickly became clear that there a lot of them – welcome but presenting a logistical problem. A solution could be to sort the items into

- Those for decision
- Policy Development
- Access Issues with National implications
- Other issues

The fourth category could if necessary be dealt with in the following way:

- The working group should consider those items for which there is not sufficient time for them to be dealt with in the Forum itself.
- Papers relating to these items be first circulated to all EAF members so they have the opportunity to feed in comments.
- The Working Group consider the items, by meeting where necessary.
- Resulting advice or decisions would go back to all EAF members for approval and ratification.
- If there is a subject uniquely close to the heart of any EAF member, that member may attend by arrangement with the Chair.

Recommendation

It is essential that business can be managed, conducted and progressed between full meetings

It is accordingly recommended that the remit and membership of the working group be confirmed as:

- Assisting the Chair with managing the business between meetings.
- Offering confidential advice to NE on the terms outlined in the Minute of 27-07-08, previously circulated.

- Considering items remitted from full EAF meetings and previously circulated to all members for comment.
- Nominations for membership when required will be remitted to the Chair who will seek to secure the best balance reflecting different interest, expertise and geographical spread, membership to be confirmed at Forum meetings.

30 September 2008