



Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF)

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

www.jlaf.org.uk

Annual Newsletter

incorporating
Annual Report
2008 - 2009



Chairmen's Report

The Joint Local Access Forum for Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire (widely known as the JLAF) was set up under the terms of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* and held its first meeting in July 2003. Its statutory role is to advise its Councils and other specified organisations on access to and enjoyment of the countryside. Additionally it advises and comments on all other matters relating to the public's enjoyment of open air activities.

1. Membership

Membership criteria are set out in the Act: One Councillor from each of the Councils and a further 19 members drawn from the general public who have a particular area of expertise and are committed to furthering the aim of access to the countryside. Appointments are made by the Local Authorities. We are pleased to be able to report that we have a full complement of members. Currently 7 represent land owning interests (rural and urban fringe farming, estate management and those with a knowledge of farming and land owning representative bodies), 10 representing user interests (including horse riding, cycling, walking, carriage driving, trail riding, off-road running and open spaces) while 2 fall in the "other" category. During the past year the three year tenure of membership expired for eight members. Five were re-appointed and four new members joined to bring the total to the full twenty two. We were sorry to lose our member who had a special knowledge of disabled matters but are confident that we continue to keep those issues firmly in mind in our deliberations.

2. Meetings and Working Methods

The JLAF meets three times a year, a decision made by its members – in the past year on 7th November 2008, 6th March and 3rd July 2009. We consider that this allows time for meetings to be properly prepared and appropriate follow-up action to be taken. This should, in theory, allow time for all members to contribute to the various Consultations to which we respond but often timescales are unrealistically short. To cover this eventuality we have a small number of "position statements" which guide the Officers in making decisions which are then taken to the next meeting of the JLAF for ratification. All our members are now on email which makes informing and consulting with them that much easier.

JLAF meetings are held at the Frys Club and Conference Centre, Somerdale, Keynsham, a venue which is central to the area and has good public transport links. Attendance during the past year has averaged 15 members. We are disappointed that we have normally only had one Councillor out of three at meetings. We value Councillors attending to get the benefit of a two-way exchange of information. The other side of the coin, though, is that we have had the regular attendance of Public Rights of Way Officers and their staff.

Serving, as we do, three Unitary Authorities we find that there is a considerable workload for the voluntary Officers. To help overcome this, in addition to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman we have made a "non-statutory" appointment of a Deputy Chairman. The three Chairmen, along with the JLAF Secretary, meet before each full JLAF meeting to agree the agenda and meet two weeks after the full meeting to agree the draft minutes and actions. In addition, the three Chairmen meet at an "interim meeting" to discuss general matters without an agenda.

Having three Chairmen enables each of the Chairmen to lead with one of our three Councils. We find this is particularly useful in representing the JLAF on Public Rights of Way Liaison Groups (PROWLG). We are fortunate that each of our Councils has a PROWLG, an informal group that meets three times a year to discuss the detail of the public rights of way networks. This enables the JLAF to perform a more strategic and wide-ranging role. We are fortunate in that each Chairman represents a different strand – one "User", one "Land interest" and one "Other". This year our Chairman, Vice Chairman and Deputy Chairman were each re-elected for another two year term.

The JLAF is supported by its Secretary, appointed and paid for jointly by the three Councils. The Secretary has an additional role as “Access Improvement Officer” for the three Councils. The JLAF Secretary has developed an outstanding website which we believe is used by other professionals. During the year the website has been re-vamped and is constantly updated. Readers of this Annual Report will find further information on www.jlaf.org.uk on all of the issues reported on below.

3. The Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan – Implementation

The JLAF was heavily involved in the preparation of the Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the publication of which in 2007 was a statutory duty for Councils. During the year the Joint plan for the area was described by Natural England as generally good, excellent in parts. The final plan and its implementation was, and is, a matter for the Councils but the JLAF maintains a continuing interest in its implementation and receives regular updates on progress. Among the projects the JLAF is interested in, and under way by the three Councils are: a rights of way infrastructure survey using the Countryside Access Management System (CAMS), a review of signposting, common new Paths Order Policies across the Councils and a website (not the JLAF’s) to facilitate access by the public to all sorts of open air activity. The JLAF was consulted on the Paths Order Policy and is particularly enthusiastic about the website having drawn the attention of Natural England to its development at one of its Officer meetings with Regional NE management.

4. JLAF Projects

During the year the JLAF has continued to work to bring a number of projects to fruition:

• Monarchs Way

A stretch of the Monarch’s Way (a long distance trail) in the Avon Meads area of Bristol cannot be properly protected and improved because of uncertainty about land ownership. Bristol City Council has been unenthusiastic about implementing any of the proposals to overcome the problem. The JLAF has joined with the Ramblers and the Civic Society to get the Council to move on this. There have been false dawns before but there is renewed reason to hope for progress during next year.

• Chew Valley Lake

The JLAF is keen to see a multi-user path around Chew Valley Lake, an important reservoir serving the Bristol Area. The project concerns two short lengths and a much more ambitious idea to eventually circle the Lake. There are complications not least of which are an SSSI and the wider protection of birds. However the main stumbling block seems to be the number of interested parties. The JLAF officers have had individual meetings with Bath and North East Somerset Council, Sustrans, Bristol Water and Natural England. We are hopeful that genuine progress has been made but this is a work in progress and is constantly being monitored.

• Lansdown, Bath

An area of open countryside access land runs along the Cotswold edge to the northwest of Bath. It affords impressive views of the city and towards the Mendip Hills and could form part of a “skyline” walk to match a similar hugely popular one to the south of the city. However, access is being disputed by the landowner who for many



Kennet & Avon Canal

years has also disputed public rights of way across adjacent parts of the property. The JLAF has insisted that the Council use its powers to ensure public access. Important legal steps were taken during the year with the JLAF Chairman speaking at the Council Committee. The legal process still has some way to run but we are hopeful that our pressure along with a stiffening of the Council's resolve will bear fruit.

• Mead Riding, Chipping Sodbury

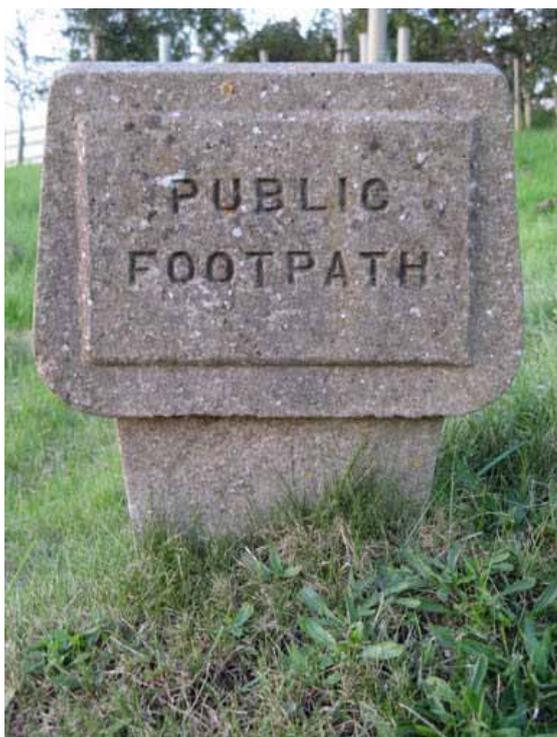
The JLAF has strongly supported the work that South Gloucestershire Council has done to re-route paths across Sodbury Common with the hope that equestrians would be allowed on the path bordering Wickwar Road. Sadly our efforts did not persuade the Commons' Conservators to allow this.

5. Joining Up the Spaghetti

This quaintly named project arises from mapping of bridleways and footpaths in the area which show that some of them could be joined up to make circular routes. During the course of the year it was decided that the role of the JLAF would be to suggest possible areas of improvement but leave individual projects to the Rights of Way Teams so that appropriate courtesies are paid to landowners in what may be sensitive matters. Members are still being encouraged to identify possible improvements and as a wider project the Councils are being urged to look at a range of improvements to the network that were suggested but not acted upon while the Rights of Way Improvement Plan was being written.

6. Gating Orders

During the past year the JLAF Officers became aware that South Gloucestershire Council had made Gating Orders in three semi-rural locations without carrying out their statutory duty to inform the JLAF. Subsequently it became clear that another Gating Order was proposed in an urban setting. A position statement was prepared setting out twelve issues which the JLAF would hope to have addressed before a Gating Order is made, not least of which is proof that it is a last resort after all other means of reducing anti-social behaviour (or the fear of it) have been tried. All our Councils have taken on board the JLAF concerns and adequate policies are in the process of being written/agreed. Our efforts in this regard have been brought to the attention of Natural England and are informing discussion at a national level. Locally we are making efforts to monitor Gating Orders which is easier where rights of way are concerned compared to "neighbourhood paths", the status of which is historically undecided.



7. National Consultations

In the year before last the JLAF put in a lot of work through two Sub-Committees to respond to Government Consultations on the Right to Apply and Appeal for Diversion Orders and Extinguishments, and Coastal Access. The first of these in which our response pointed to serious problems appears to have been shelved, while Coastal Access which we supported with a few reservations will hopefully become law in Autumn 2009. This year our Officers have prepared responses on the basis of members having submitted opinions to two Natural England Consultations: The Review of National Trails and Routes and Natural England's Draft Access Policy.

8. Local Consultations

• Council Planning and Development Policies

The JLAF had previously contributed to Bristol City's Core Strategy Preferred Options in February 2008. We followed this up with a response to the Preferred Options Review this year and have found that the latest document is very much in line with our thinking. Broadly the stance which the JLAF has taken to planning matters is not to get involved with whether developments are necessary but to try to insist that all planning is fundamentally informed by the *Green Infrastructure Agenda*. We believe we have been instrumental (along with others) in getting our Councils to take this viewpoint seriously.

• Traffic Regulation Orders on Byways

Bath and North East Somerset Council brought their proposed TROs on three byways to the JLAF meeting in July 2009 and got unanimous support from members that these vulnerable highways should be protected from inappropriate use by Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs).

9. England Access Forum, Regional Support for LAFs and Natural England

The JLAF has played a role in getting Natural England to support a regional organisation for Local Access Forums. We have worked to get the South West representation on the nascent England Access Forum to be representative of all LAF interests. The JLAF Chairman is now one of the two South West Representatives on the EAF which it is hoped will be influential in dealings with Natural England and through them with Defra. Locally the JLAF Officers have had two meetings with Natural England management. The first was to further the Chew Valley Lake project. The second took as its starting point Natural England's *Strategic Direction 2008 – 2013*. Natural England is still settling down after fundamental re-organisation. We like to think that we have helped to create an awareness of the Local Access Forum agenda which could be a starting point for useful co-operation between the two institutions more widely than just in the JLAF area.

- Ron Phelps, Deputy Chairman of the JLAF
- Robin Winfield, Vice Chairman
- Ray Newbigin, Chairman

August 2009

Secretary's Report

The JLAF has 22 voluntary members, that is, one councillor from each authority involved and 19

MEMBER	INTEREST	DESCRIPTION	Attendance at JLAF Meetings		
			15	16	17
Ray Newbigin Chairman of the JLAF (Vice Chair 2003-2006, Chairman NOV06-JUL10)	Other interests	Keen to increase the demand for outdoor recreation and is now Chairman of the JLAF.	✓	✓	✓
Robin Winfield Vice Chairman of the JLAF (NOV06-JUL08, JUL08-JUL10)	Landowning interests	Previously NFU Group Secretary and sat on the South Gloucestershire ROW Liaison Group and now Vice Chairman of the JLAF.	✓	✓	✓
Ron Phelps Deputy Chairman of the JLAF (NOV06-JUL08, JUL08-JUL10)	User interests	Avon Area Access Officer for the local Ramblers' Association and is now the Deputy Chairman of the JLAF.	✓	✓	✓
Councillor Chris Cray Bath & North East Somerset Council		Nominated as a JLAF Member by Bath & North East Somerset Council.	✗	✗	✓
Councillor Kevin Quartley Bristol City Council		Nominated as a JLAF Member by Bristol City Council.	✗	✗	✓
Councillor Malcolm Bridge South Gloucestershire Council		Nominated as a JLAF Member by South Gloucestershire Council.	✓	✓	✗
Janine Averis	Landowning interests	A landowner, keen horse rider and dog walker who wants quality, accessible routes away from roads.	✓	✓	✗
*Chris Bloor	User interests	A walker and runner, enthusiastic about leisure pedestrian routes and has published books of circular routes linking to the Community Forest Path. South Gloucestershire Local Correspondent to the Open Spaces Society.	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD
*Jill Britten	Landowning interests	Has farmed countryside on the southern edge of Bristol for 40 years, enjoys seeing responsible users and encourages the conservation of nature.	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD

*Bill Dawson	User interests	Drives a pony and trap and participates in Driving for the Disabled.	✓	✓	✓
*Ann Fay	User interests	The local British Horse Society (BHS) Access and Bridleways Officer for South Gloucestershire and Bristol and works with people with disabilities.	✓	✓	✓
Anna Ferguson	Other interests	Passionate about encouraging access to the outdoors for health and to socially excluded groups. An interest in the conservation of amphibians and reptiles, and Chair of Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group.	✓	✗	✗
Roger Fowler	User interests	User in most categories, landowner with Public Rights of Way on his land and a member of the TRF (Trail Riders Fellowship).	✓	✓	✓
Peter Gould	User interests	Bristol Area Footpath Secretary for the Ramblers' Association and author of publications about exploring the countryside.	✓	✓	✓
*John Gunnery	Landowning interests	Landowner, farmer who provides Toll Rides for horses and member of the CLA (Country, Land and Business Association).	✗	✓	✓
Robert Killen	Landowning interests	A Chartered Surveyor and Land Agent for two estates in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.	✓	✓	✓
Colette Linehan	User interests	A regular commuting & leisure walker and cyclist who would like to make these activities more accessible: "many youngsters especially, do not have the freedom to explore their world that even my generation benefited from and I passionately believe that this is a trend that rapidly needs reversing".	✓	✓	✓
*Bernadette Macey	User interests	A volunteer Health Walk leader in Bath. Enjoys walking for pleasure and to get around.	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD
*Andrew Short	User interests	Active cyclist and walker. Interested in promoting commuting and leisure cycling and related safety issues.	✓	✓	✓
*Adam Stratton	Landowning interests	A farmer with land in the Forest of Avon and much of this land is in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.	✗	✗	✓
*David Waterstone	User interests	The Chairman for the Avon Area of the Ramblers Association, active with the Cotswold AONB Voluntary Wardens.	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD	NOT APPOINTED WHEN THIS MEETING WAS HELD
Margaret Wilson	Landowning interests	A farmer and founder member of the Chew Valley Recreational Trail Association.	✗	✗	✓

* Appointments made by JLAF on 1st July 2009

JLAF Observers

There are a number of observers of the JLAF. These are bodies or individuals that are invited to the JLAF meetings, who can provide information to the JLAF or receive advice from the JLAF. These include a member of the executive of each council, secretaries of adjacent Local Access Forums and government and agency contacts.

JLAF Website

A JLAF website has been maintained at www.jlaf.org.uk, now with frequent updates of news of interest to members and others. Papers for all of the meetings of the JLAF are available from the secretary and on the JLAF website. The website includes all meeting papers of the JLAF, documents produced by the JLAF and other information that relates to the work of the JLAF.

JLAF Work Programme 2009/10

The JLAF has a statutory interest in the following areas of work:

• Access Land

Following the new right coming into force in December 2004, the JLAF maintains a statutory interest, for example in considering applications for restrictions on access land. The JLAF will wish to review work on access land in its area as the 10 year review of access land mapping approaches.

• Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs)

The JLAF is a statutory consultee for Rights of Way Improvement Plans. The JLAF has an interest in ensuring the Councils implement this plan effectively. In particular, the JLAF would like to see the results of a full network survey used to improve the maintenance of the network of public rights of way. The JLAF wishes to ensure that the Councils increase demand for use of Public Rights of Way, so increasing the number of people using the network.

In addition, the JLAF is keen to liaise closely with authorities, ensuring effective management and promotion of Public Rights of Way and any related subjects, including planning, stimulating demand and to promote the significant benefits that this can bring. The JLAF will continue to develop its relationships with other bodies, including adjacent LAFs and the Public Rights of Way Liaison Groups arranged by each council.

JLAF Forward Programme 2009 / 2010

The table on the following page shows meetings proposed for 2009-10. This does not include any additional meetings including sub-groups that might be arranged.

EVENT / MEETING	DATE	LOCATION
JLAF17 Draft Minutes Published	FR 27MAR09	
JLAF18 Agenda items submitted by	FR 22MAY09	
JLAF18 Agenda & papers available	FR 05JUN09	
JLAF18 Main Meeting	FR 03JUL09	Fry Club, Keynsham
JLAF18 Draft Minutes Published	FR 24JUL09	
JLAF19 Agenda items submitted by	FR 02OCT09	
JLAF19 Agenda and papers available	FR 23OCT09	
JLAF19 Main Meeting	FR 06NOV09	Fry Club, Keynsham
JLAF19 Draft Minutes Published	FR 27NOV09	
JLAF20 Agenda items submitted by	FR 15JAN10	
JLAF20 Agenda and papers available	FR 19FEB10	
JLAF20 Main Meeting	FR 05MAR10	Fry Club, Keynsham
JLAF20 Draft Minutes Published	FR 26MAR10	

This is a report on the sixth year of the Joint Local Access Forum for Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire (the JLAF). This report fulfils the requirements of paragraph 13 of The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007.

Further information about the JLAF is available on the JLAF website at:

www.jlaf.org.uk

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**Ray Newbigin, Chairman
Robin Winfield, Vice Chairman
Ron Phelps, Deputy Chairman**

The Cotswold Way crosses Penn Hill

