

Item 4 – Officer’s Report

This paper covers:

- Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013
- NE Support for LAFs
- Local Sustainable Transport Fund & DfT funding
- HCC Design Standards
- Coastal Access
- National Trails Review
- Paths for Communities
- LARA Reports

Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013

The new [Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013](#) was given Royal Assent and became law on 25 April. The Act includes changes to:

- Public rights of way in the planning process – path diversions and extinguishments can now be applied for when a planning application is made, allowing the path order to be processed at the same time as the planning application. Path orders will not be confirmed until planning permission has been given. This should help speed up the planning process when an alteration to a right of way is necessary.
- The registration process for Town and Village Greens – applications cannot now be made after a ‘trigger event’. Trigger events include applications for planning permission, allocation of land for development in Local or Neighbourhood Plans, and the publishing of such plans in draft. This may lead to a short term increase in applications being made to proactively ‘protect’ greens, but in the longer term it is likely that fewer Greens will be registered as applications will no longer be triggered by development.
- Applications for Town and Village Greens – which must now be made whilst the land is being used as a Green or within one year of the use ceasing. Previously this was two years.
- Declarations of non-dedication – statutory declarations can now be made to protect against applications for Town and Village Greens as well as for new public rights of way. The renewal period for all deposits will be extended from 10 to 20 years. An administration charge may now be made by the Local Authority for deposits.

Natural England support for LAFs

Natural England wrote to all south-east LAFs in April with the news that:

- Kevin Haugh is NE’s local contact for LAFs. It is expected that Kevin will be in touch with each LAF to discuss a more targeted approach to NE support
- NE will continue to contract and support LAF regional co-ordinators

- NE will be producing a quarterly newsletter for LAFs which will include opportunities to share good practice, information from NE and Defra, and details about how NE will work with and support LAFs this year

The [Chief Executive's report](#) to the NE Board Meeting on 23 May noted that the 2012-13 targets in respect of LAFs had been exceeded with 79% (target 70%) of LAFs submitting an annual report proforma, and 96% (target 85%) of LAFs represented on Huddle. (See page 13 of linked report.)

Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) & DfT funding

The National Park Authority's Sustainability Team is now established, and is working with its LSTF partners (the South Downs NPA and the highway authorities in both Parks) on projects that will improve public transport services, promote travel by cycle, bus and rail, and make visitor attractions easier to reach. Much of this will be achieved through influencing people's travel choices, and supporting small scale infrastructure improvements.

For example, the New Forest Community Routes project will identify and promote the best existing routes for people to travel between settlements and into the countryside without using motorised transport, and will use some of the LSTF grant to improve the existing infrastructure for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders both on and off road.

As reported at the last meeting, the [Sustainable Transport Solutions Fund](#) is open to applications. Successful applications to date include support for Twizy electric car rentals, development of self-guided cycle trails, and support for a wider choice of rental cycles.

In response to the Government's announcement in March of a £12 million grant fund to support cycling in National Parks, the NPA has submitted a bid to support family cycling in the New Forest. Support from selected partners was sought, and Alastair submitted a letter on behalf of the Forum, after seeking advice from Peter as the cycling representative. Full details of the bid, including letters of support can be found on the NPA's website.

Bids were also submitted from the following National Parks: Lake District, North York Moors, Peak District, Norfolk Broads, Dartmoor, South Downs and Yorkshire Dales. An announcement on which of these will be successful will shortly be made by the Department for Transport.

HCC Design Standards

The NFAF recently commented on HCC's proposed Design Standards for countryside infrastructure. The Standards have now been published and are available for download from HCC's website:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/countryside/countryside-design-standards.htm>

There are a wide range of structures on Hampshire's path network, which vary in their construction and adherence to current best practice. For example, there are many different versions of gates, boardwalks, steps, bridges, and drainage features.

In order to encourage a good minimum standard and a greater consistency in approach, HCC Countryside Service has produced the standard designs for use by its own officers, partners (e.g. Parish, Town and District Councils, landowners, volunteer groups, local organisations) and others. They describe what the Countryside Service would like to see in Hampshire's countryside, drawing on:

- Legal requirements (they all meet or exceed these)
- Best Practice nationally, through guides such as BTCV's (TCV's) 'Footpaths'
- Other Counties' practices and specifications
- The expertise and experience of officers at HCC

Officers have distilled information from the above sources to provide a good minimum standard appropriate for Hampshire's landscape and typical paths, to be used when structures are replaced. They will be appropriate for most but not all situations and are not comprehensive or exhaustive, and should not preclude local distinctiveness.

HCC officers are now using these guides and its hoped that others will find them useful in guiding their choice of structure or materials. In time and as needed, HCC hopes to add standards for other structures – for example, rural car park surfacing or bird hides.

Coastal Access

The review of the [Coastal Access Scheme](#) has been completed, and Natural England is now drafting a revised Scheme which will be published for consultation in the late summer. It is not anticipated that there will be any major changes. Following the consultation, the final revised Scheme will be submitted to Parliament in 2014.

Natural England is proposing to change the design of the Coastal Access Reports. The intention is to produce reports that contain as much information, but which are presented in a more concise, and less wordy, style. The new style reports are likely to be more interactive and designed for viewing on the internet. No Reports are currently open for consultation but examples of the 'old style' reports can be found on the website:

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/access/coastalaccess/default.aspx

The implementation of coastal access remains a priority for Natural England, and a budget for 2013-14 has been agreed. Following on from research showing that the Welsh Coastal Path attracted 3 million visitors and was worth £16 million to the Welsh economy between September 2011 and August 2012, Natural England will commission some work to establish the effect of coastal access on the economy. It will also try to quantify health and socio-economic benefits.

Defra has not yet published the results of its [consultation](#) on the inclusion of the Isle of Wight in the Coastal Access work.

National Trails Review

Over the last two years Natural England has been reviewing the management arrangements for National Trails. Proposals for future management of National Trails were made to the [NE Board in March](#).

Details of the future management of National Trails have now been published in "[The New deal](#)". Trail Partnerships will be established which will take responsibility for local delivery, and revised Quality Standards will be introduced. Natural England will support the Trails nationally and make the case for continued central funding. A funding model for the first 3 years has been agreed. [WalkEngland](#) will promote the National Trails family.

Paths for Communities

Nine Paths for Communities grants worth £448,000 have now been approved. This is slightly behind the 2012-13 target of £500,000. However, 29 full applications for projects with a total value of £1.7 million are expected to be made before the end of June, so it is anticipated that the full £2 million grant fund will be spent on enhancing the network of public rights of way in England.

More information about the grant scheme can be found on the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c

LARA Reports

LARA (Motoring Organisations' Land Access and Recreation Association) has published a new handbook on good practice in managing motor traffic on unsealed public roads, 'Traffic Management Hierarchy'. LARA suggests that over the last few years two new factors have come to bear upon this issue: the financial cuts suffered by councils, and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, leading to waterlogged ground conditions far more often than a decade ago. This guidance is intended to be helpful to all concerned, and LARA invites and welcomes suggestions for improvement. It has suggested that Local Access Forums may be interested in the handbook.

The 2-part handbook, and a paper on unmetalled, unclassified roads, can be downloaded from the website www.laragb.org