

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

Workshops: Access for All

Bristol Conference:

Alastair Duncan, New Forest LAF
Joan Cundill, New Forest Access for All

Durham Conference:

John Law, South Lincolnshire LAF

Speaker's Summary – Bristol

The purpose of the workshop was to present and discuss three recent improvements to access in the New Forest for people with mobility impairments.

1. SID AND FLOSS' EASY-GOING WALKS MAPS - Joan

These maps are a collection of 16 walks and 4 easy-access places which New Forest Access for All (NFAFA), Joan's charity, have surveyed and mapped for people with mobility difficulties. They are not aimed at serious ramblers, but for people looking for a pleasant day out in the New Forest who need good access information.

Why SID and FLOSS? SID stands for **S**upplementary **I**nformation for the **D**isabled, and FLOSS, **F**acilities, **L**ength of walk, **O**bstacles, **S**urface quality and **S**lopes - gradients and cross-falls. The method of collecting access data and the criteria used to design the maps was discussed

Main points:

- 1. Nearly all the delegates at the workshop acknowledged that they had a family member or friend with a mobility difficulty.** Everyone has an interest in improving access to the countryside, especially with increasing life span.
- 2. There is no such thing as an 'accessible' or 'all-ability' countryside walk.** 'Easy-going' is a better descriptor.
- 3. People with mobility difficulties need good, relevant, access information so that they can decide for themselves if a walk is suitable for their own needs and abilities.**
- 4. A nationally-recognised evaluation system across the UK similar to the SID and FLOSS access criteria is needed. Natural England were invited to consider taking this project forward**

The maps are widely available in the New Forest, and they can be downloaded from the website www.newforestaccessforall.org.uk

2. INCLUSIVE CYCLING – Alastair

Introduction

This presentation describes the acquisition of a range of specially designed bikes and trikes for use in the New Forest National Park (NFNPA) by those with a wide

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

variety of disabilities. It also highlights errors made in setting up the project, and points to watch if seeking to replicate a similar scheme.

History

Hampshire County Council (HCC) invited bids from interested parties for funding aimed at creating opportunities for disabled children. The period between initial advertising of the opportunity, submission of the bid, consideration of the bids, and spending of money granted was ridiculously tight, being in the order of four months. The bid from NFNPA was successful, and a total of £36400 was amassed mainly from the HCC grant, but with contributions from New Forest District Council and the NFNPA. A selection of bikes and trikes were purchased with advice from a supplier, Quest 88. (www.quest88.com)

Day-to-day management

A local cycle hire company offered to manage the fleet, and a purpose designed trailer was purchased in order to transport the fleet to various venues. The arrangement with the cycle hire company is a loose one, they being responsible for maintenance, and having the ability to hire out machines (at a reduced rate from what would be a commercial rate). They take the profit. The NFNPA subsidise maintenance to the tune of £2000 pa. The NFNPA have an officer who, on a part time basis, arranges free try-out sessions to interested groups. The cycle hire company transports the fleet to such venues and is in attendance on the day. The NFNPA officer has insufficient time to widen the circle of interested groups, so that the sessions are largely enjoyed by the same clients each time. A small amount of medium term hire of individual trikes has been trialled to individual families. The identifying and location of suitable venues has proved a problem. Such sites need to be reasonably level, preferably providing a circuit, and access to fresh air and scenery. As a result of these shortcomings, there has been a considerable amount of down-time. In addition the robustness of some of the models has been disappointing with high maintenance demands.

In summary, the concept is a brilliant one. However, research should be undertaken beforehand in terms of choice of model, identification of suitable venues, establishment of an appropriate management structure or hire partner, identification of appropriate disability groups, storage and advice above all from an organisation called "Wheels for All". (www.cycling.org.uk) This organisation runs over 35 specialised centres, has considerable experience and knowledge of running such activities, with specialist medical advice available on types of disability catered for etc.

In short, an excellent concept, very similar in idea to the well-established Riding for the Disabled. However, for success, research is needed, and management time available to promote and deal with the day-to-day detail of the scheme.

3. NEW FOREST COMMUNITY TOILET SCHEME – Joan

This joint project was developed by New Forest Access For All, NFAFA, and is supported by the National Park Authority, NPA.

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

Businesses and community facilities which take part in the scheme, allow residents and visitors to use their toilet facilities during normal opening hours, without the need to make a purchase, as part of their responsibility to their local communities. To date there are 21 venues in the scheme. It is an initiative to make the New Forest even more accessible and welcoming.

Knowing that toilet facilities are available is a vitally important access issue for people with disabilities to plan and enjoy a day out, as 'hedge tickets' are not usually an option. There are no public toilet facilities in the north of the New Forest, one of the main reasons that the scheme was started, so that people with disabilities have the option to explore this beautiful area of the National Park.

The NPA has details of the scheme on their website:

http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/info/20052/visitor_information/141/community_toilet_scheme

Alastair Duncan and Joan Cundill – February 2014

NFAFA is a small, local charity run by volunteers, who work to improve access and opportunities for people with disabilities and other access needs in the New Forest area. We are not qualified access consultants, but we are affiliated to the National Register of Access Consultants.

Speaker's Summary – Durham Conference

The workshop provided information on how the Lincolnshire & Rutland LAFs are producing routes suitable for the disabled. The literature relating to the routes includes surface types, gradients etc. to enable people to make decisions on whether a route is suitable or challenging enough for them. The aim being, to give people of all abilities more opportunities to enjoy the countryside. Also provided in the workshop was the "Let's Get Going" pack, this could be used by other LAFs, should they wish to follow a similar process to create routes suitable for the disabled. The presentation touched on investigations, which are being carried out on producing a standardised method of measuring & displaying Countryside For All routes UK wide and a suitable web site to display Countryside For All accredited routes. Discussions then took place in relation to some of the issues, which would help deliver improved access to the countryside for people with disabilities.

John Law

Question, Answers, Observations

Helpful if Natural England or Visit England websites could have links to 'access for all' information in Wales, Scotland or elsewhere.

Access For All often a misnomer - just focussing on disabled. There are other underrepresented groups in the countryside: ethnic minorities and young people for example.

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

Disabled people cannot be spontaneous when they go out they need prior info about facilities and conditions before going anywhere.

Need to know where they can use a mobility scooter.

Visually impaired make up for lack of sight by using other senses, need to be catered for – good audio guides, guide dog issues, need to know what is up ahead.

Car parking facilities are important.

Information needs to be for everyone – signs need to use braille, website needs to cater for blind etc. although not everyone reads braille- need for oral alternatives.

Example from the Yorkshire Dales where hearing impaired groups of people use a Ranger as a guide

Highway Authority often concerned because more funding needed for maintenance of disability friendly routes, lack of resources, need for consistency (with furniture etc.). Need for volunteers to get involved due to lack of staff.

Suggestion: Public health funding can be a good source

More easy access can lead to more anti-social behaviour like fly tipping etc.

Open access is on most Local Authority agendas and should be incorporated into ROWIPs.

Takes a lot of time for LAFs to initiate this – South Lincs LAF has joined with another on this initiative to spread the load.

Requires a long-term approach by Highway Authority.

Funding opportunities to promote 'access for all' –Health funding, Lottery, Transport Initiatives, Network Rail. EEC, sponsorship

Important to include village, town or city parks when discussing access.

Issues around public transport (timings and reliability) so be careful when promoting it for use by disabled. However, many people do not have cars; if people use public transport it gets better; 'promoting' lets the disabled person make the choice; sustainability is an issue.

Final thoughts on improving access to the countryside for disabled people:

- Improved furniture on ROW
- Improved information
- What is good for disabled is good for everyone.

The Lincolnshire County Council packs that were given out as examples of routes can be found at the web address:

National LAF Conferences 2013 – 14

<http://microsites.lincolnshire.gov.uk/countryside/visiting-the-countryside/countryside-for-all/>