

Local Access Forum (LAF) Annual Review Proforma	
Reporting year	2012-2013
Name of LAF	Dudley Borough Local Access Forum
Name of LAF Chair	Tina Boothroyd
Name of LAF secretary	DMBC lead officer David Keeley
Involvement and Representation	
What interests does your current membership cover?	
Ex Council Warden, open spaces and Parks and Nature Reserve Friends Group members, ex Councillors, Canal Trust, Current Councillors and representation from disabled access groups	
What skills, sectors, interest groups, experience are missing?	
Independent land owners and younger people, farmers.	
Have you had any issues recruiting members from particular sectors?	
Yes. We have difficulty getting people from across the full geographic area of Dudley Borough. The membership is still heavily dominated by Halesowen residents. We plan to proactively recruit people from other areas	
How have you focussed on improving access for all?	
We have made representation to the Rights of Way Team at DMBC to make ALL attempts to make ANY improvements to RoW in the Borough accessible to as many people as possible and to bear in mind that disabled people also want to be able to access the countryside and all areas. We have requested that all stiles that are installed or require replacement to be of an ambulant design and to have consulted with Access in Dudley and DMBC's joint publication- the Green spaces access design guidelines which supports standards for disabled access.	

Leadership and Participation

Have you developed independent leadership from within the LAF?

Yes

Does everyone participate equally in meetings?

Yes

Role and Remit

Did your procedures work effectively?

Yes

Are your resources sufficient for your activity?

Yes as far as our meetings are concerned, however we would like the resources to expand our activity criteria, information regarding DBLAF and walks available within the Borough.

Give up to 3 examples of where you have encountered difficulties; explain what mechanism could be put in place to alleviate such issues.

1. We have some difficulties with permissive paths that we believe should be RoW, but we have so far been unable to achieve this through DMBC. We are researching ideas to address the situation. 2. We have a situation regarding Planning and an open space which has failed to resolve itself despite S106 Agreement. The S106 Agreement appears not to have been enforced by DMBC and as a result, the land affected remains in abeyance. We continue to monitor the situation. 3. We have had cause to explain the role of the LAF to leading members of DMBC after a misunderstanding regarding our role and powers.

Give up to 3 examples of advice given by your LAF to section 94 bodies.

Gating orders, RoW issues including modification orders and planning applications that affect RoW

Open Access Work

How many Restriction Cases have you been consulted on?

Two Gating orders, one sanctioned, although the evidence presented did not stack up for LAF support of the order and one withdrawn.

How many cases have you responded to?

Both

Detail any informal involvement with Open Access Restriction cases.

None

Teamwork and Consensus

Have you had conflict and how did you handle it?

There has been no other conflict other than the misunderstanding involving the Council Member's idea of the role of the Forum. This was clearly explained to the Leader of the Council and there has been no further incident since.

How have you mastered the skill of decision making by consensus?

All decisions are made after a full and sometimes frank discussion by the LAF and then a consensus by majority vote.

Partnership and Progress

Do you work well with the access authority? If not why not?

We believe so, yes.

Have you established a clear role for the LAF in the local area?
We believe that there needs to be a much clearer understanding by the local community of what we are and our role, and we will make attempts to do so by better advertising ourselves. Although our meetings are public, we rarely have any public attending and we should be more proactive in our attempts to let the population of the Borough know about us and our work. It appears that it is not enough to post the minutes of the meetings on the DMBC website.
Were you successful in meeting the achievements set out in your work programme (please provide supporting information)?
No, but we are planning to carry these items into next year and have actually got some arrangements to carry out some of the proposed training in place. We are going to hold discussions on recruitment shortly. Some of the proposed working parties have taken place and others have been organised.
Have you achieved something else?
We have achieved a framework and a structure of cooperation so that we can now move forward with a more confident approach to anything we do.
Profile and Direction
Is your LAF independent, respected and trusted? We are absolutely independent and we believe we are respected and trusted

Do you have close relationships with the planning authorities?

Yes, we are consulted on any planning application that affects any existing or proposed RoW and some other relevant issues. We have also been consulted on other plans and issues from a variety of Council Officers and other bodies.

Has anything changed over the last year?

The LAF has had a change of Councillor representation but this has not caused any difficulties for the LAF. We have also had a change of Council lead officer. Although this has been a loss to the LAF, the new lead officer was already working very closely with the LAF and the transition has been smooth and relaxed.

What changes / barriers can you see ahead?

We cannot see any changes as we write this report but what could be difficult in the future would be further changes to the current staff / officers or cuts to the LAF budget.

What are your priorities for the year ahead (list up to 3)?

Amongst others; 1. To carry out previously mentioned training. 2. Promote the role of the forum to the public and advertise our function as an independent advisory body. 3. To advocate changes to S106 Agreements to consider the wording used in these arrangements to better enforce such agreements for the better protection of the open environment and protection of RoW and other issues.

What support or training do you need to deliver your priorities?

Continued facilitation from the Council staff and continued financial support.

Final comments from Appointing Authority

This Forum has proved to be both independent and constructive in its approach to working with DMBC. The group is full of knowledgeable people who give their spare time in order to improve the Borough. This is appreciated and respected by all of the Officers who work with the Forum. The huge changes that have already happened and are on the horizon within local government means that bodies such as this one will have an increasing role to play as we move forward, the forum will no doubt respond to this changing environment with the flexibility and innovation that we have come to expect from DBLAF.

Final comments from LAF Chair

I think that this urban LAF is working very well. I would like to see that we are able to complete our training programmes this coming year and the further development of the RoW working parties getting larger and more active. We would also like to have contact with our Natural England contact Angela Smith as we have not seen or heard from her. Although we do not have problems which require her attention or input, we do feel as though we have been abandoned. We feel a little disadvantaged because we are an urban LAF and as such we do not fit with the criteria for funding and therefore feel that we are losing out on funding that more rural LAF's can access- despite the fact that we do have a large area of rural land within the Borough. I am grateful to every member of our LAF for being a good group of people and for their participation, cooperation and commitment and their support for me as their chair. It is both an honour and a pleasure