

The Local Access Forum for the County of Northamptonshire is known as The Northamptonshire Local Access Forum (NLAF) was formed to comply with government legislation.

- **The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002.**
- **The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007.**

Operation of NLAF will comply with the guidance within these regulations and any subsequent revisions, NLAF will also see to adoption examples of Best Practice to ensure NLAF is operating in the most efficient and effective manner.

1. New Purpose / Aim

The Purpose/Aim of Northamptonshire Local Access Forum is to advise Northampton County Council, as appointing authority for the area, regarding matters affecting public access within the county.

2. Role

- 2.1. Provide advice to the County Council on the improvement of public access to land within the County for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area.
- 2.2. Respond to Natural England on the draft maps of open country and registered common land.
- 2.3. In an advisory capacity, contribute to the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for the County.
- 2.4. Comment on the County Council's access strategies with a view to developing additional opportunities for everyone to enjoy the rights of way network, with particular emphasis on encouraging those who might feel excluded, for example people with disabilities.
- 2.5. Advise on the promotion of opportunities for the appropriate use and enjoyment of the countryside.
- 2.6. Advise upon the appropriate management and maintenance of access to land in the County to which the public have access for open-air recreation.
- 2.7. NLAF will set their priorities and forward plan for investigations depending on local issues on an annual basis, but they will endeavor to respond to consultations and draft policy documents. When making recommendations, NLAF members will consider land use, as well as the need to conserve flora, fauna, geological and physical features.
- 2.8. NLAF will provide advice to Section 94 bodies being:
 - The Appointing Authority (Northamptonshire County Council)
 - Any County, Borough, District, Unitary within the area of the Forum
 - The Secretary of State (meaning any Government Dept. with Secretary of State)
 - Natural England
 - Forestry Commission
 - English HeritageRegulation 21 also permits advice to:
 - Sport England (English Sports Council)
 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Conservation Boards
 - Parish and Town Councils
- 2.9. Advice to Section 94 Bodies will be one or more of the following
 - Improvements to Public Access to land (by foot, cycle, horse or mechanically propelled vehicle that is lawful to status of the land) for purpose of recreation and enjoyment
 - Public Access to land for lawful purposes
 - Public Access to land by mechanically propelled vehicle for Byways open to Traffic
- 2.10. NLAF Advice to Section 94 bodies will be sent with clarity surrounding their advice:

This Letter Constitutes formal advice from the Northamptonshire Local Access Forum. (Insert name of section 94 body) is required in accordance with section 94 (5) of The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to the relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

3. Responsibilities

- 3.1. To have regard to the needs of land management, biodiversity, wildlife management and the interests of landowners.
- 3.2. Take into account statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State whilst operating within the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and regulations made there under.
- 3.3. Respect local circumstances as well as environmental, social, economic and educational interests.
- 3.4. Members are **not** on the Forum to express their own views, pursue their own enthusiasms or pet projects, or resolve personal issues. Members are there to speak for everyone, not just the concerns of their own community group, i.e. Land management representatives must think beyond their own land holdings and express the views of the land management community.
- 3.5. Members must take active steps to stay in touch with the community they represent so that they can convey its views to the Forum
- 3.6. Members of the County Council can be appointed to serve on the Forum, but these members must be clear if they are represent 'public agency' interests or 'community' interests in their responses.
- 3.7. Forum members will ensure that time invested in NLAf is worthwhile and that advice makes a positive contribution to decisions affecting the local area. NLAf should therefore consider and agree criteria against which to measure their effectiveness, namely the amount, relevance, range of advice given; feedback from section 94(4) bodies; assessments of where advice has made a difference, and actions taken in response to issues raised.
- 3.8. NLAf will ensure they remain up to date with policies and wider political and local changes affecting Northamptonshire County Council and Northamptonshire Highways services to ensure they remain effective in providing advice.
- 3.9. Members will not use meetings to side step escalation functions already in place – Street Doctor etc.

4. Membership of the Forum

- 4.1. The Forum shall consist of a **minimum of 10 and maximum of 22 members** of whom 3 may be County or District councillors. A record of Members appointment terms and interests will be recorded and kept up to date on the NLAf Webpages.
- 4.2. Individual members will, through consultation, represent a field of interest rather than a particular organisation of which they might also be a member. A reasonable balance of members representing different interests will be maintained.
- 4.3. Authority Officer Membership is permitted however there are restrictions.
 - 4.3.1. If NLAf has no more than 16 members, can have 2 Authority Officer Members
 - 4.3.2. if over 17 can have 3 Authority Officer Members
- 4.4. Appointment to the forum will be for a period of three years, but members can be reappointed at the end of their term. Vacancies will be advertised to be filled as soon as possible once they arise. NLAf Chair will advise NCC of membership vacancies and request recruitment.
- 4.5. NLAf can request the access authority to terminate a member's appointment if they:
 - Repeatedly fail to attend meetings
 - Fail to reflect wider community views

- Act against the interests of the Local Access Forum. After non-attendance for one year their membership will be terminated.
- Are rude or abusive to other NLAH members or Officers of Northamptonshire County Council/Northamptonshire Highways.

5. Chair and Vice Chair

- 5.1. The Chair and Vice Chair will be drawn from Forum members and be elected by whichever method the Forum decides appropriate. The Chair and Vice Chair will represent different categories of interest and members of the appointing authority will not be eligible for either position.
- 5.2. The period of appointment to these posts will be for 1 year that can be renewed for a further year, after which the post-holder cannot be elected to the same post for the subsequent year. If either post becomes vacant during the period of appointment, the Forum may decide that both posts should be filled afresh.
- 5.3. The chairman should work with the forum secretary (and the appointing authority) to ensure meetings are arranged well in advance, and are advertised.
- 5.4. The chair in consultation with the forum and the secretary will draft the agenda for NLAH meetings.
- 5.5. The chair will get to see the 'scope' of new applicants to NLAH prior to their appointment for consideration of suitability to joint NLAH

6. Meetings of the Forum

- 6.1. Meetings are to be held at **least twice every year**, but more frequently if the Forum considers it necessary – **but no more than 4**.
- 6.2. The meetings shall be deemed to be quorate when one third of the current membership (rounded down) is present.
- 6.3. Members who have a personal interest, whether direct or indirect, in a matter to be discussed by the Forum should disclose that interest at the meeting.
A personal interest is defined as one which might affect a member's wellbeing, financial position or business, or that of a relative or friend, to a greater extent than that of other council tax payers, rate payers or other inhabitants of the area.
Personal interests will be recorded in the minutes but will not prohibit that member from taking part in the discussion of that item.
- 6.4. Copies of the agenda for each meeting, the papers and minutes of each meeting will be made available for on the County Councils Forum website for a period of two years after the meeting.
- 6.5. The agenda will be made available to the public no less than three working days prior to a meeting being held.
- 6.6. The timing of meetings (e.g. whether daytime or evenings, weekdays or weekends) and the venue, should take account of the needs and preferences of forum members and others who may attend the meetings. Where appropriate the NLAH will vary the location and timing of meetings to enable a larger number and range of people to attend.
- 6.7. Matters can be put to the vote but this should be seen as a last resort.
- 6.8. Meetings will not be used to side step functions for escalation already in place – Street Doctor etc.

7. Public Access to Meetings

- 7.1. The meetings will be open to the public but people may be excluded if necessary to prevent disorderly conduct or misbehaviour.
- 7.2. Members of the public may submit questions to the Forum. The questions asked by members of the public must be on a subject pertinent to the Terms of Reference of NLAH.

The questions must be submitted to the secretariat at least one working day prior to the NLA meeting.

- 7.3. Members of the public who wish to speak on a particular subject may do so for a maximum of 3 minutes.
- 7.4. Observers may (at the discretion of the Forum's Chair) attend and take part in the discussion but cannot vote on or take part in the decision-making.
- 7.5. A representative of the Rights of Way section, Northamptonshire County Council shall attend all meetings as an observer.

8. Secretary

- 8.1. The Secretary to the Forum will be responsible for the overall administration of the Forum including organising the meetings, drafting the minutes and other documents as required, and liaising with neighbouring Forums and the appointing authority.
- 8.2. The Secretary will ensure awareness of Data Protection and Information Management when publishing information ensuring censoring documents prior to publication where necessary.
- 8.3. Northamptonshire County Council will provide the secretariat or funding to appoint one.
 - 8.3.1. Where an existing employee is appointed as secretary, a clear separation between their forum and any other responsibilities should be maintained. An existing employee may come from a relevant department of the authority.
- 8.4. Secretary Roles and Expectations
 - 8.4.1. Acting as the point of contact for anyone wishing to contact the forum, and forwarding information on to the chairman and/or members as appropriate
 - 8.4.2. Liaising with NCC to ensure the meetings and proceedings of the forum are publicised
 - 8.4.3. Receiving, prioritising and processing consultations and requests for advice.
 - 8.4.4. Organising and advertising meetings
 - 8.4.5. Ensure copies of the agenda for each meeting, the papers and minutes of each meeting will be made available on the Forum website
 - 8.4.6. Taking the minutes of meetings;
 - 8.4.7. Assisting the chairman and members in conducting meetings so as to comply with statutory requirements.
 - 8.4.8. Assisting with production of the forward work programme and annual report
 - 8.4.9. Ascertaining the appropriate named individual or team to which forum advice should be sent, and sending the forums advice.
 - 8.4.10. The forum secretary will request feedback at the time of submitting advice to a section 94(4) body, and then follow up the request if necessary, so that the results can be reported to the forum
 - 8.4.11. Liaising with NCC regarding financial management of the forum and processing of members expenses.

9. Annual Report

- 9.1. The Forum shall prepare an annual report on its work which the NCC will publish on its Website.
 - 9.1.1. The Report should briefly set out the main issues and occasions on which the forum gave advice during the year, and indicate the bodies to whom advice was given. The report may also:
 - 9.1.1.1. Success or effectiveness and completing its forward work programme;
 - 9.1.1.2. Give information on the members (interests) meetings held and the main issues discussed;
 - 9.1.1.3. Summarise any feedback received from section 94(4) bodies;

- 9.1.1.4. identify issues which posed a particular challenge for the forum;
- 9.2. The NLAf Annual Report shall be presented to the Cabinet of Northamptonshire County Council prior to 9.3.
- 9.3. A copy will be sent a copy to Natural England within 21 days of publication.

10. Expenses

- 10.1. Reasonable expenses associated with the normal work of the Forum may be reimbursed; but only in respect of:
 - 10.1.1. travel and subsistence costs; and
 - 10.1.2. any expenses of arranging for the care of their children or dependants.
- 10.2. Any site visits requested of NLAf **must be agreed in advance** by the Forum anyone who goes to do them under their own steam without group agreement would not be paid.
- 10.3. Mileage will be based on the same rates as paid to NCC rates staff, and will be solely based on Home address to Meeting address and return as per BING Maps - <https://www.bing.com/maps>
- 10.4. Mileage claims will be signed off annually with regard to meetings attended and any additional journeys details as held by the Secretary.
- 10.5. **Members must keep all receipts relating to claims made for up to six years.** It is important that these receipts are retained, as they will need to be provided in the event of a VAT inspection. Failure to provide receipts covering business travel and expense claims made could result in NCC incurring unexpected costs

11. Complaints

- 11.1. Although NLAf is an independent advisory body, NCC should ensure that NLAf conducts its business within its statutory remit having regard to the Regulations and Guidance issued by Government.
- 11.2. Any complaints about the conduct of a forum, or a forum member, should be dealt with through the appointing authority's normal complaints procedures.