

SLOUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM – 12<sup>th</sup> January 2010

**LETTER FROM CHAIR OF ENGLAND ACCESS FORUM RE: INVOLVEMENT OF LAFS IN DEVELOPING COASTAL ACCESS ROUTE**

Dear Fellow Chair,

You will be interested to read the good news below. It follows from meetings which Matthew Balfour of Kent and I had with the Minister Hugh Irranca-Davies and the Shadow Minister Richard Benyon which had been agreed with EAF earlier this year.

We stressed the value-added of LAFs as a reservoir of expertise and local knowledge with a proven track record of sound advice and ability to be act as ‘honest brokers.’ It was agreed by both that the collective voice of LAFs through EAF was an important and balanced advocate nationally for access.

The extract is from Hansard and can be found at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm091026/debtext/91026-0010.htm>

"Mr. Benyon: The Minister mentioned local access forums. They are feeling a little unloved at the moment, so will he give his leadership and ensure that they are genuinely consulted? Local access forums have a wealth of experience and understand what is required in delivering greater access, and they do that for next to nothing. They are a cheap and welcome addition to the expertise that already exists, but the Minister might like to put his weight behind ensuring that they feel part of the process.

Huw Irranca-Davies: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I met the local access forums two weeks ago, and they want to play a pivotal role in the coastal routes’ development. Their members have expertise, they are volunteers, and they know the routes and the lie of the land. I cannot conceive how local access forums would not be part and parcel of the coastal routes’ development.

The ethos of the Bill is to use local knowledge from walking the routes to devise the proposal that will go to the Secretary of State. If the hon. Gentleman wants leadership in saying that local access forums, in all different shapes and sizes throughout the country, should be part and parcel of the scheme, I give him that categorical assurance."

Best Wishes

Duncan Graham  
Chair of EAF and Cumbria LAF

PS. Note from Matthew Balfour:

I hope that you are as pleased as Duncan and I with what was said in the above....what Duncan didn't have when he sent out his letter above was the last quote from Nick Herbert in yesterday's Third Reading : "We would like to see much of the responsibility for the route devolved to voluntary access forums and local authorities. We believe that a top-down approach to coastal access is not the answer and that local groups are much better placed to designate and manage the shape of the route."