



## Essex Local Access Forum Minutes

Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026 at 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm  
Held virtually (via Microsoft Teams)

### **Members present:**

John Buchanan - Chair

### **Local Authority Officers present:**

Shirley Anglin

### **Members of the Public:**

Steph Driver  
Vernon Glashier  
John Victory  
Martyn Towns  
Geoff Fletcher  
Rowena Macaulay  
Sally Macmanus  
Aaron Ashwood  
Lucy White

### **Apologies:**

Councillor Katherine Evans  
Janet Arthur  
Ed Dixon

**Minute Taker:** Val Cleare, Business Support

### **1. Welcome and Minutes of the Last Meeting**

Shirley Anglin confirmed that the meeting recording would be used solely for minute-taking purposes. She noted that Janet Arthur had sent apologies.

John Buchanan welcomed the group and confirmed he would chair the meeting in Katherine's absence. All documents, including the previous minutes, had been circulated in advance.

Shirley advised that Val had prepared the previous minutes and that they represented a significant improvement over those from May. John thanked Val.

The minutes were accepted with no amendments. Shirley confirmed that the May minutes had been tidied and published on the website.

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## 2. Green Infrastructure Initiative – Natural England

John Buchanan discussed ongoing attempts to engage with Natural England regarding the national Green Infrastructure Initiative. Jane Fleming had originally agreed to attend but had since left Natural England. Patrick Welsh was seeking a replacement for the next meeting and had provided links and documents.

John shared Natural England's SharePoint site for Local Access Forums and noted that many members were not aware it existed. Danielle Radley of Natural England had been actively updating it. Website: [LAF@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:LAF@naturalengland.org.uk)

He also presented the Green Infrastructure Framework, highlighting key principles: nature-rich places, active and healthy communities, thriving settlements, improved water management and climate resilience.

National standards included:

- Access to varied green/blue spaces within 15 minutes of home
- Doorstep green space: 0.5 ha within 200 m
- 2 ha natural space within 300 m
- 10 ha natural space within 1 km

John emphasised the relevance of these standards for influencing planning decisions, especially relating to footpath access in new developments.

He demonstrated the Green Infrastructure mapping tool, which displayed inconsistencies, such as privately-owned Osea Island being shown as public access, and a school football pitch incorrectly included. Members agreed these inaccuracies should be raised with Natural England.

Steph highlighted the need for accurate information, noting potential use cases for disabled people travelling for work. She suggested a crowdsourced correction mechanism.

Members agreed that ELAF should seek clarity from Natural England on:

- How map data is updated
- Whether local feedback can be submitted
- How accessibility exclusions on open access land are represented

It was agreed that ELAF would revisit this when a Natural England representative attends.

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### 3. Update from the Regional Local Access Forum Meeting

John summarised the Regional LAF meeting attended by himself and Katherine. LAFs across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and other areas varied in size and activity level.

Examples of good practice included:

- Suffolk LAF presenting annually to its County Council, supported by an engaged councillor
- Norfolk LAF actively identifying stakeholders and strengthening relationships with groups such as the Ramblers and internal council departments

John raised the issue that ELAF is not a statutory consultee for planning applications in some districts. He suggested that the Forum explore becoming one to ensure its views on access are incorporated early in the planning process.

Sally offered to investigate the registration process and report back.

Martyn cautioned about the volume of planning applications but agreed major developments should not be missed.

John noted that other consultees likely used filtering processes, and ELAF may benefit from similar arrangements.

Large-scale issues being tackled in neighbouring counties included electricity pylons and the Sizewell reactor project.

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### 4. Rights of Way Improvement Plan – Review Update

Shirley advised that Simon Taylor had prepared a draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) using extensive input from LAF members. The draft was now undergoing internal ECC review.

Rowena confirmed that members had only seen the material they had contributed directly. Shirley explained the next stages:

- Internal review
- Public consultation
- Incorporation of feedback
- ECC governance approval
- Submission to relevant councillors (after the May elections)

Members queried whether they would see the final draft before consultation; Shirley confirmed all stakeholders (LAF, Ramblers, EBA) would receive it simultaneously.

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## 5. Mobility Aid Laws Consultation

Steph introduced the Government consultation on powered mobility aid legislation. She shared links to official documents and supporting information from Wheels for Wellbeing.

Website: <https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/our-campaigns/campaigning/my-cycle-my-mobility-aid/>

She explained that current legislation—based on outdated “invalid carriage” definitions—does not reflect modern mobility technology. Issues included:

- Inability to legally use certain devices
- Lack of insurance options
- Restrictions on tandem mobility aids
- Inability to carry small children
- Incompatibility with modern add-ons and power-assist equipment
- Inconsistent treatment compared to micro-mobility schemes (e-bikes/e-scooters)

She stressed the relevance to ELAF: improved mobility access would enable more disabled people to reach green spaces and then challenge inaccessible routes.

Members discussed permitted speeds, parity with joggers, practical enforcement, and the need for common-sense legislation.

Vernon suggested Steph prepare draft points for ELAF to consider; members could then contribute perspectives and finalise a collective response.

Rowena encouraged framing the issue as one of *access to nature*, making it squarely within ELAF’s remit.

Shirley shared links to British Standards for gaps, gates and stiles and noted that current standards often do not accommodate longer or taller mobility aids.

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## 6. ECC Report – Including Local Government Reform and Impact on LAFs

Shirley delivered the ECC update.

### Staffing

- Andy Reynolds’ Definitive Map role remains vacant
- Mary Morris (claims officer) has not been replaced (handled by Essex Legal Services)
- New team member Peter is successfully reviewing bridges countywide

**Budgets**

- Expected to remain at last year's level

**Schemes**

- Hawkwell 35 brought forward to create a new bridleway due to a badger sett impacting the original alignment
- Winter cutting programme underway
- Fingerpost replacement continuing annually
- Network Rail TWAO programme nearing completion

**England Coast Path**

- Work progressing on Mersea Island; route legally designated though not yet fully available
- Work continuing on Harwich to Shotley Gate stretch
- Earlier designation allows ECC to claim maintenance funding sooner

**Highways Contract**

- Entire Essex Highways contract ends March next year
- Full re-tender planned
- Local government reform complicates timelines
- A 7-year contract is expected, with break clauses for future unitary authorities

**Future of LAFs**

- Likely that a LAF will be required for each new unitary authority
- Potential for increased influence due to closer integration with planning and environmental services

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**7. Ramblers Accessibility Fund – Project Proposals**

John reminded members about the Fund.

Rowena strongly encouraged applications, citing a successful £6,000 project that removed multiple barriers and improved bridges and boardwalks across the Colchester Orbital.

Steph identified problematic kissing gates in Wivenhoe but noted she could not currently take on the time-intensive process of identifying landowners and liaising with stakeholders.

Shirley confirmed:

- ECC cannot share landowner details due to GDPR
- Land Registry searches can be used

- ECC can act where a structure is broken or unauthorised, but cannot deliver funded upgrades unless landowner cooperation is secured

Rowena and Steph agreed to discuss the Wivenhoe barriers separately.

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## **8. Essex NSIPs – Longfield Solar Farm, Hedgehog Grove Solar Farm, A12 Widening, Lower Thames Crossing, Norwich–Tilbury Pylons**

No new updates since the last meeting.

Shirley confirmed that all recent engagement from ELAF had been well received and that no additional major infrastructure proposals had appeared.

John suggested creating a standard ELAF response framework for solar farm applications, emphasising public access considerations. Shirley will check ECC's design guide, which may already include such standards.

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## **9. Update from the Byways Working Group**

Vernon provided a detailed update from the 18 November meeting.

### **Issues discussed included:**

- Fly-tipping and encampments in Brentwood
- Potential TROs and width restrictions
- Encroachment concerns in Dunton
- Capital schemes completed last year
- Flooding at Stanford Rivers 41
- Croxton's Mill ford TRO objections
- Encroachment on Bardfield Saling 13
- Long-standing garage on Black Notley 13
- Badger activity on Wethersfield 14
- Fencing off definitive line on West Horndon 67
- TRO planned for Newport 10 (M11 truncation)
- Monitoring of Dedham 47
- Wimbish 98 damage from heavy vehicles
- Fly-tipping at Willingale 61
- Legitimacy of TRO at Bowers Gifford 150
- Chrishall 3 shared-use concerns resolved
- Lindsell 5 in good condition
- Bardfield Saling 1 deteriorating surface requiring attention

Shirley confirmed that several of these locations were already noted for review.

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## 10. Any Other Business

### Unauthorised Kissing Gate – Colchester

Rowena reported an unauthorised new kissing gate installed across Public Footpath 25 Stanway (Jansma Park). Shirley will follow up.

### Cycle Parking Audit

Steph reported no response from a previous enquiry to Lucy Page regarding the cycle audit.

### Membership

Steph queried the LAF membership process. Shirley confirmed appointment would be completed upon Katherine's return.

Lucy raised concerns regarding two ageing bridges on Bridleways 22 and 17 (Stanway). Structural engineers had inspected them, temporary repairs were in place, and full re-decking was scheduled subject to weather conditions.

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## 11. Meeting Close

John thanked all attendees for their contributions and confirmed the next meeting date:

**12 May 2026.** Members were invited to submit agenda items to Shirley.

The meeting closed with thanks and farewells.

| Action                                                                                                                           | Owner                     | Due Date                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Provide link to Natural England SharePoint site for LAFs (already completed during meeting)                                      | John Buchanan             | Completed                    |
| Contact Natural England (Danielle/P. Welsh) to clarify: data accuracy, update process, ability for LAF to contribute corrections | John Buchanan             | Before next meeting (12 May) |
| Circulate Green Infrastructure links shared during meeting                                                                       | Val Cleare (with Shirley) | With final minutes           |
| Investigate whether ELAF can become a statutory consultee for planning applications                                              | Sally McManus             | Next meeting                 |
| Provide ELAF with standard ECC solar farm response (if available in design guide)                                                | Shirley Anglin            | Completed                    |

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Prepare a draft summary of key points for ELAF's response to Mobility Aid Laws consultation        | Steph                                  | Before April (consultation closes)    |
| ELAF members to read the 36-page mobility aid consultation and contribute to consolidated response | All members                            | Before April                          |
| Arrange formal appointment of Steph as an ELAF member                                              | Shirley Anglin & Katherine (on return) | TBC                                   |
| Provide link to British Standard for Gaps, Gates & Stiles                                          | Shirley Anglin                         | Completed during meeting              |
| Follow up on unauthorised kissing gate installed at Jansma Park (PF25)                             | Shirley Anglin                         | TBC                                   |
| Rowena & Steph to discuss Wivenhoe barriers outside meeting                                        | Rowena & Steph                         | TBC                                   |
| Add any future agenda items to next meeting agenda                                                 | All members (via Shirley)              | Before 12 May 2026                    |
| Discuss preparedness for changes due to Local Government Reform (future LAF structure)             | ELAF (no action now)                   | Deferred until reorganisation clearer |