

Gloucestershire Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2024-2025

Introduction

1 The GLAF has had a busy year in 2024/25, and amongst its greatest achievements has been the completion of the Connecting Parishes Project, which originated as an idea from the GLAF, and which was followed through with a successful bid for significant funding. Eighteen PROW close to the A417 highway improvement scheme have now been created or had improvements made, to increase their overall accessibility. Away from this the GLAF is still actively trying to push forward for a survey on, and subsequent repairs to, the Llanthony swing bridge, to reconnect residents and visitors from Gloucester City Centre to the very important and extensive strategic access resource at Alney Island, and this issue will continue to be a focus in 2025/26. We are also continuing to press GCC to improve their efficiency in processing DMMOs in particular (as well as PPOs) and have given formal advice to the effect that non-contentious DMMOs should be dealt with via officer delegated powers (rather than being sent to Committee). Again, this is something we will continue to press for during the coming year.

2 The membership of GLAF has been very active between our three meetings, and this included a very successful visit to the Accessibility Centre at Aston Rowant in Oxfordshire during the summer of 2024 as well as visits to sites improved by the Connecting Parishes Project. Despite this very productive year for the GLAF, following another dip in membership for various personal reasons during the latter part of the 2024/25 (and which has unfortunately continued in early 2025/26), recruitment of new members will also be a focus for the coming year.

Alison Williamson
GLAF Chair

Purpose and Functions of Local Access Forum

3. Gloucestershire Local Access Forum (GLAF) was established by Gloucestershire County Council in 2003 and consists of members appointed by the County Council representing users of rights of way and access land and also owners and occupiers of land crossed by rights of way. In addition, two councillors serve on the forum. Whilst Gloucestershire traditionally had an informal consultative body, since at least the 1960's, GLAF is a statutory body established by Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and is also subject to the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007. Local operational arrangements are set out in the GLAF terms of reference.

4. Its functions are to provide advice to the county council and Natural England also to parish and town councils and National Landscapes (formerly AONB) on rights of way and access land established under the CROW Act 2000. It generally meets three times a year and as such provides a strategic overview of matters rather than being involved in operational matters, although these often inform the work of GLAF.

Membership as at 31 March 2025

Member Name	Representational Group
Alison Williamson (Chair)	Nature
Richard Holmes (Vice-Chair)	Users
Sue Ellis	Users (Resigned 12 June 2025)
Jackie German	Users
Cllr Rebekah Hoyland	County Councillor
Paul Lockley	Users
Lucy Moriarty	Landowner/Nature
Charlie Morriss	Users
Alan Shelley	Landowner (Resigned 12 June 2025)
Chas Townley	Users
Cllr Robert Vines	County Councillor (Resigned 4 May 2025)

5. Robert Vines, following the county elections is no longer a councillor, so has ended his association with the Forum. Alan Shelley and Sue Ellis have also both resigned. Alan had been a member of the forum since it was created and has been very knowledgeable about common land issues. Sue Ellis was a horse rider and member of the British Horse Society. GLAF thanks the members for their contributions to the Forum.

Meetings during 2024-2025

6. The Forum held three meetings in the year on the 27 June, 24 October 2024 and 13 February 2025. The June and February meetings were held at Brockworth and Charlton Kings respectively, following site visits to look at routes improved through the Connecting Parishes project (discussed in paragraph 10). The October meeting was held at Shire Hall and included a presentation on the Eelscapes project, being led by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

Range of Issues Discussed

Definitive Map Modification Orders

7. The Forum remains concerned about the slow progress with the processing of Definitive Map Modification Orders, which can be made under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Regular statistics on this are reported to both GLAF and the Environment Scrutiny Committee. We note that the County Council considered a motion on this subject at its meeting on the 12 September 2024, which after discussion was passed unanimously by the Council.

8. Over a long period time, the forum has made a series of suggestions to improve the speed of progress, including suggesting efficiency improvements to the investigation process and more recently at the February meeting, recommended that the Council follows the lead of other authorities by delegating more decision making to officers. There are currently more than 45 objected orders, some originating from applications made more than two decades ago. We note that the council has increased funding a couple of years ago, but if this logjam is going to be broken, it is likely that additional resources are required.

Diversion, Extinguishment and Creation Orders

9. Applications to divert, extinguish or create rights of way can be made under the Highways Act (HA) to the county council, or in the case of land affected by development applications can be made under the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) to the district, borough and city councils. GLAF is concerned that there is a three-year backlog for HA applications, to the extent that the Council now maintains a waiting list before applications are invited. During the year, additional staff were recruited with the Rights of Way team, as much of this area of work can be self-financed by charges to applicants. Whilst this is currently a discretionary service, it is important that this work is prioritised as orders often result in reducing conflicts and difficulties for both landowners and users.

Connecting Parishes Project

10. GLAF has been actively involved in the Connecting Parishes Project which has seen a further £163,000 invested in 17 schemes providing accessibility and connectivity improvements to paths in parishes close to the Air Balloon “missing link” scheme using National Highways designated funds. This project demonstrates the benefit of relatively small investments in improving the rights of way network and the Forum would like to see opportunities for such improvements to more widely available.

Maintenance of the Network

11. Reports of issues encountered on the Rights of Way network can now be reported through the Gloucestershire Fix My Street application, The Forum receives statistical updates on work undertaken and it was reported that PROW received over 2600 reports and requests during the year and 3439 service requests were resolved during the same period. The Public Rights of Way team were also asked to comment on 509 planning applications by planning authorities, which were considered to have an impact on the rights of way network.

Former Railway Bridges

12. GLAF is aware of continuing issues with identifying funding for three former railway bridges, which illustrate the difficulties in progressing essential works within existing budgets. They have been well known about for several years, in consequence GLAF is asking for regular updates on progress: -

- **Stowfield Viaduct (also known as Lydbrook Bridge)** – This is a jointly owned by Gloucestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council and takes the Wye Valley Walk from Lydbrook to Welsh Bicknor and is an adopted highway. It was closed for some years from 2016 until a temporary surface was constructed, this has now failed but at the time of our February meeting no information on a plan for its repair had been established.
- **Pilley Foot Bridge, Charlton Kings (also described as Patesians Bridge)** – This bridge was closed 9½ years ago due to safety concerns. Using funding from the Connecting Parishes project a Quantity Surveyor has costed options, however, no funding has yet been identified for the repairs or other options. Additionally, there is no clarity as to who is responsible for the bridge. It was purchased in 1971 by Cheltenham Borough Council, following the closure of the railway line. The footpath across the bridge is on the

definitive map but as a former railway bridge the County Council responsibility extends only to the surface of the path, but the structure also needs to be repaired by the owner.

- **Llanthony Swing Bridge, Gloucester** – This is a historic railway bridge, reputedly linked to Brunel (but evidence for this is disputed). It is a grade II listed structure, owned by the County Council. It previously provided permissive access to Alney Island but is now in disrepair and has been unusable for many years. Some GLAF members have observed that there is a risk of adverse possession arising on part of the land owned by the County Council and as a result lawful access from the city side of the bridge could be at risk of being lost. Currently, there is no confirmation that this issue has been addressed.

Disability Access

13. During the year GLAF members visited the National Land Access Centre at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, which demonstrates the use and maintenance of gaps, latches and gates to improve access to the countryside, including for users of trampers and other vehicles for disabled ramblers. Some of the facilities seen at Aston Rowant are experimental, nevertheless the Forum is keen for these to be trialled within Gloucestershire. The Forum is represented on the Cotswold Trails and Access Partnership, which using DEFRA funding allocated through Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) in 2024-2025 has spent £254,000 on 25 projects. CNL are developing additional tramper routes within the CNL at Leckhampton Hill and Coopers Hill.