As with any Local Access Forum, the North Somerset Local Access Forum has been set up to do the following:

‘..advise decision making organisations (such as local authorities) about making improvements to public access for outdoor recreation and sustainable travel.

LAFs can set their own priorities depending on local issues. They also respond to consultations and draft policy documents..’

Therefore in response to the call for evidence for the Natural Environment and Rural Communities act, as Chairperson of the North Somerset Local Access Forum, I have one specific point that I would like to raise.

Although the act itself was quite light in relation to Rights of Way, as it was defining the role of Natural England:

‘Natural England’s general purpose includes— (a) promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity, (b) conserving and enhancing the landscape, (c) securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment, (d) promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation, and (e) contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment’

It was clear that the general purpose was to include both the provision and improvement of existing rights of way.

This however must include a provision for all vulnerable road users and anyone who wish to enjoy the countryside and who use the rights of way network. One area of grey that we see as a Local Access Forum is that there is no specific definition of what is meant by a ‘multi-user path’, although there is a push to ensure that when new routes are created that they are multi user. Do to know specific definition, to some this may include horse riders, cyclists and pedestrians, however to others it may only include pedestrians and cyclists. As there is no conclusive wording for this, often in the end, routes are designated as cycleways or only include cyclists and pedestrians, leaving horse riders, an additional vulnerable road user group to be excluded, putting them at a distinct disadvantage. Clarification of this and the inclusion of horse riders into a definition of users of a multi-user path would significantly aid in providing an additional group with the benefit of protection from having to use roads and also giving them access to enjoy the natural environment and to open up more spaces and ability for open-air recreation.
This is an area that currently I do not feel that Natural England has used their powers to aid with.

Yours Sincerely,

Miss Julie Main
Chairperson, North Somerset Local Access Forum

5 September 2017