

Cabinet

Report Title:	Suffolk Local Access Forum Annual Report 2022/23
Meeting Date:	10 October 2023
Lead Councillor(s):	Councillor Paul West, Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding
Local Councillor(s):	All Councillors
Director:	Andrew Cook, Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure
Assistant Director or Head of Service:	Steve Palfrey, Assistant Director, Waste and Environment
Author:	David Falk, Green Access Manager, 07843 467 964, david.falk@suffolk.gov.uk

Brief summary of the item to be considered

1. Local Access Forums were established by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Their role is to advise various bodies on matters affecting countryside access and the public rights of way network.
2. All forums have an appointing authority. For the Suffolk Local Access Forum (SLAF) that is Suffolk County Council (SCC). The authority provides secretariat services and appoints members. Forums can have between 10 and 22 members. Most members are volunteers with up to 3 appointed by the County and District Councils. Each member has well established connections with countryside access, bringing together a wide range of complementary skills, knowledge, and experiences.
3. In addition to advising their relevant appointing authority, forums are also statutory consultees to various organisations such as National Highways, Network Rail and Natural England.
4. Under the Local Access Forum (England) Regulations 2007 (part 13), SLAF are required to submit an Annual Report to SCC. This is their twentieth Annual Report, and it provides a summary of their activities between August 2022 and July 2023.

What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The Cabinet is being asked to accept the Suffolk Local Access Forum Annual Report 2022/23 and address the report's recommendations and state the actions that the Council is taking to address those recommendations. |
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Reason for recommendation

6. Under the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007, local access forums are required to submit an annual report on rights of way and access matters to their appointing authority and it is a requirement for that authority to publish the report. Guidance states that: “We would expect the authority to respond positively to the forum’s annual report and to say what actions they have taken on the advice and recommendations of the forum.”

What are the key issues to consider?

The key issues raised by the Suffolk Local Access Forum 2022/23 report are as follows:

a) Suffolk’s Energy Schemes:

The forum fully recognises the urgency of developing sustainable options for energy production in the UK and supports efforts by Suffolk County Council to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. However, the forum has serious concerns over proposals within Suffolk by energy companies for significant large-scale infrastructure projects that will impact on people’s continued enjoyment of Suffolk’s green access network, change traditional farming practices, and impact on the county’s natural environment. Of specific concern are large scale solar farms that will replace agriculturally productive land, new electricity pylons that will disrupt public rights of way (PRoW) and impact on the appearance of the landscape, and the effect of Sizewell C power station on a sensitive and protected landscape. The forum seeks alternative options to be fully investigated, wherever practical, and mitigations including payments to the county council, to deliver on the country’s energy needs but without avoidable adverse effects.

Response: The Council thanks the forum for their support for SCC’s ambition of carbon neutrality by 2030 and acknowledges their concerns over the numerous energy projects proposed and being developed in Suffolk. The Council recognising the key role Suffolk plays in developing sustainable energy production for the benefit of the UK and will continue to work with energy companies and key stakeholders to ensure mitigation on the green access network is integral to any proposal and, where appropriate, options to minimise the impact of schemes are achieved.

b) Severance of the Rights of Way network:

Over the years the forum has continually focused on how proposals by organisations and developers adversely impact on green access especially where they sever the public rights of way network. The forum continues to press Network Rail, National Highways, and developers to enhance access specifically with Network Rail implementing a Transport and Works Act Order, National Highways improving green access as an integral feature of proposals at Copdock Interchange and Fiveways roundabout, and the borough authority and developers enhancing access in Ipswich Garden Suburb and on Ipswich waterfront.

Response: The Council recognises the positive impact the forum has with various organisations including Network Rail and National Highways and will continue to support the forum in its work with such organisations and others to gain positive improvements to the green access network.

c) Enhancing Suffolk’s Green Access network:

The forum congratulates SCC officers on initiatives to enhance and promote green access in the county and press SCC to deliver phase 2 of a new trail linking Horringer with Bury St Edmunds, develop a brand that promotes the East Anglian sections of the King Charles III England Coast Path, and engage with community groups to promote Suffolk as a walking and outdoor destination for all.

Response: The Council thanks the forum for recognising such initiatives and the benefits they bring to Suffolk and its communities. SCC will continue to deliver such projects that, where appropriate, develop countryside access for all users with special regard to ethnic minorities and disadvantaged communities in line with the objectives of The Suffolk Green Access Strategy.

How does this relate to the County Council objectives?

7. This report is linked to the County Council’s objectives indicated below:

Promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Strengthening our local economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Protecting and enhancing our environment (including carbon reduction)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Providing value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

How will this impact on the Council’s objectives?

8. The Suffolk Local Access Forum’s role, activities and recommendations are based on encouraging and enabling a greater use of the green access network. Public rights of way form a significant part of that network and are integral to the county council’s walking and cycling highway infrastructure. The forum’s focus on improving the network benefits sustainable travel choices and healthier lifestyles. This relates to each of the County Council’s objectives.

What are the resource and risk implications?

- 9. The Suffolk Local Access Forum understands the on-going pressures for the Council on public finances.
- 10. The forum thanks the Council for acknowledging the importance of green access and providing additional resources to the Rights of Way and Access Team to manage this area of work more effectively. The forum encourages the county council to continue its investment in, and commitment to, green access.
- 11. The forum understands the importance of green access on people’s physical health and mental wellbeing, as well as its importance to the rural economy, and asks the Council to continue its on-going support in this area.
- 12. The Executive Director for Growth Highways and Infrastructure will consider and discuss with the Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding the appropriate level of Suffolk County Council funding for the public rights of way and green access network when looking at the priorities for Council revenue and capital budgets, recognising the contribution to healthy and

sustainable communities and the benefits to the rural economy that the network provides.

13. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required for the SLAF Annual Report 2022-2023, as advised by SCC Lead for Equalities and Inclusion.

What are the timescales associated with this decision?

14. Not applicable

Alternative options

15. Cabinet could change the responses given by Suffolk County Council to the recommendations from the Suffolk Local Access Forum or could suggest additional issues that it would like the forum to explore over the coming year.

Who will be affected by this decision?

16. Officers acting on these recommendations and users of public rights of way, communities, and landowners within Suffolk.

Main body of report

Suffolk Local Access Forum Annual Report 2022/23

17. This is the twentieth Annual Report of the Suffolk Local Access Forum and provides a summary of the forum's activities between August 2022 and July 2023.
18. The forum met quarterly on:
 - 27 October 2022
 - a) Meeting held at The Hold, Ipswich (10 members attended, 4 apologies)
 - b) Meeting was preceded by a morning site visit to Ipswich Byway 38, Ipswich Restricted Byway 38A and Ipswich Waterfront Public Open Space.
 - 26 January 2023
 - a) Meeting held at EDF Sizewell B Visitor Centre (10 members attended, 4 apologies, 1 guest speaker).
 - b) Meeting was preceded by a morning site visit to Sizewell Beach to understand the extent and impact of proposals for Sizewell C on public access, the rights of way network, and specifically Leiston-Cum-Sizewell public footpath 21.
 - c) Presentation in the afternoon's meeting provided an overview of Nationally Strategic Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and other energy projects across Suffolk.
 - 25 April 2023
 - a) Meeting held at Mildenhall Cricket Club (12 members attended, 5 apologies).

- b) Meeting was preceded by morning training session on public rights of way and green access and site visits to green access projects.
 - 27 July 2023
 - a) Meeting held at National Trust Ickworth House (11 members attended, 5 apologies, 1 guest speaker).
 - b) Meeting was preceded by a morning site visit to Horringer public footpath 7, a newly created public right of way linking Horringer with Bury St Edmunds.
 - c) Presentation in the afternoon's meeting provided an overview of National Trust's approach to sustainable access to their sites and how that linked with green access developments by SCC off-site.
19. Meetings are open to the public.
20. A full list of members is given in Appendix A.

Administering SLAF

21. Members of SLAF are all volunteers with a wide range of experiences and knowledge of countryside access. They represent interests in walking, cycling, horse riding, disabilities, conservation, outdoor sport, land management and tourism. All are recruited following SCC's recruitment process.
22. In addition to the volunteer members, the Suffolk Local Access Forum has 2 councillor members, representing the County Council and the District Councils. These members are appointed by SCC Full Council and by the Suffolk Chief Officers Leadership Team, respectively.
23. The forum's independence is reflected in them having their own logo, letter heading, email address and website page on the Suffolk County Council website at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-forum>.
24. SCC's Rights of Way and Access team administers the forum, providing secretariat services, booking meeting rooms, arranging refreshments, inviting speakers, organising site visits, re-imbursing travel expenses, and recruiting new members.
25. The cost of administering the forum in 2022-23 was £1,628.05.
26. The forum thanks the Rights of Way and Access team for their on-going support, advice and assistance which is vital to the forum performing their duties.

SLAF Activities in 2022/23

Suffolk Energy Schemes

27. The forum welcomed a presentation in January 2023 from SCC's Strategic Energy Projects Manager on the variety and complexity of the numerous energy schemes affecting Suffolk.

28. During the year the forum also received presentations and updates from SCC officers on the following schemes:
- a) Sizewell C:
 - Forum members were concerned over closures to Leiston-Cum-Sizewell Bridleway 19 and how an alternative route was being provided.
 - b) Sunnica Energy Farm:
 - The forum supports the dedication of new routes for walking and cycling as public rights of way as a legacy of this development.
 - The forum congratulated SCC officers for gaining agreement for £250,000 funding for green access improvements but noted this was far short of expectations.
 - c) National Grid Bramford to Twinstead Reinforcement.
 - The forum is concerned over the impact new pylons will have on existing land management and the use of public rights of way and raised these concerns with Jo Churchill MP.
 - d) Norwich to Tilbury (formerly East Anglia Green Energy Enablement (GREEN)).
 - The forum questioned the need for overground infrastructure in place of offshore options, the use of green field sites instead of brown field sites for new infrastructure and worked regionally with other LAFs to respond to proposals.
 - e) Scottish Power East Anglia ONE North and East Anglia TWO offshore windfarms.
 - f) Scottish Power East Anglia THREE (EA3) offshore windfarm:
 - g) National Grid Sea Link (Suffolk to Kent).
 - h) National Grid Nautilus Interconnector (UK to Belgium).

Network Rail

29. The forum has raised concerns with Network Rail over significant delays in progressing the Suffolk-wide Transport and Works Act Order.
30. The forum has also expressed frustration to Network Rail over lengthy delays delivering works associated with the closure of the Gypsy Lane crossing in Needham Market.
31. The forum congratulated SCC officers in securing £300,000 from Network Rail as compensation for the closure of the Gypsy Lane crossing, to enhance public rights of way and green access along the Gipping Valley Path and in Needham Market. The forum notes, however, the payment has still not been transferred to the county council.
32. The forum was pleased to see works implemented under the Transport and Works Act Order to divert Higham Public Footpath 1.

33. The forum questioned Network Rail on the closure of Brantham Public Footpath 6 and their proposals to extinguish the route. The forum requested additional information is posted at key points along public rights of way, and on the Discover Suffolk app, to inform users when closures were in force.

National Highways

34. The forum pressed National Highways for proposals under the Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) for the Copdock Interchange junction of the A12 and A14, and the Fiveways junction on the A11 at Barton Mills, to deliver significant improvements for green access, if schemes are approved.
35. At Copdock Interchange the forum pressed for safe connections between communities to be created by developing existing underpasses under the main carriageways.
36. At Fiveways junction the forum is keen to see a grade-separated crossing of the A11 to link residents of Mildenhall and Barton Mills with the Lark Valley Path, a long-distance promoted trail between Mildenhall and Bury St Edmunds.

New Cut West, Ipswich

37. The forum carried out a site visit to a public outdoor space (POS) at New Cut West, on Ipswich waterfront to understand the context and issues surrounding opening the space to the public.
38. The forum welcomed the opportunity to improve access along the waterfront and potentially create a continuous cycle link between the waterfront and Wherstead Road.
39. However, the forum is frustrated by the lengthy delays opening the POS, by access to and around the POS, and by the aesthetics of existing and proposed new fencing related to train movements into the POS.
40. In November 2022 the forum wrote to Associated British Ports (ABP) and in February 2023 to Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) asking both organisations to address their issues and resolve matters for the benefit of people living in and visiting the area. The forum gained a response from IBC but are still awaiting a response from ABP.

Planning

41. In August 2022, the forum responded to Ipswich Borough Council on a Reserved Matters consultation on 'Land South of Railway Line Westerfield Road'. The forum raised issues over the impact of the Ipswich Garden Suburb on the rights of way network and pressed for routes to be well designed to encourage walking and cycling throughout the site and on to neighbouring destinations.

King Charles III England Coast Path

42. The forum welcomes ongoing work by SCC Officers and Natural England to determine and approve the route of the King Charles III England Coast Path.

43. The forum strongly supports proposals by SCC for a new branded regional trail following the coast path through Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex.

Fen Bridge, Dedham

44. The forum attended and welcomed the opening of Fen Bridge over the River Stour in Dedham Vale, but questioned SCC on why temporary structures could not be installed until permanent new bridges were built. The forum accepted this could increase project costs and understood budget pressures within the authority, but pressed SCC to improve accessibility at Fen Bridge as a second phase of the project.

Improving Green Access

45. The forum congratulated SCC officers on opening phase one of a new bridleway linking Horringer with Bury St Edmunds, providing an off-road route for walking and cycling to avoid using the A143.
46. The forum wrote to SCC to support phase 2 of this project which will surface the bridleway to enable year-round, all-weather use.
47. In July 2023 the forum received a presentation from the General Manager of National Trust Ickworth Estate and learned how actions within the estate to encourage more active visits, linked with the new bridleway between Horringer and Bury St Edmunds.

Regional Local Access Forum

48. The forum chair attended a regional LAF meeting via Zoom on 19 January 2023 and the chair and vice-chair both attended a meeting via Zoom on 20 July 2023.
49. Regional meetings allow LAFs to learn from each other, share advice, identify common issues and work collectively to effect change.
50. The forums remain frustrated at the lack of support provided by Natural England to them.

SLAF Membership

51. The forum had 17 members during the period covered by this report. Three new members joined the forum in April 2023 and two members stepped down in July 2023.

Working Groups:

52. The forum has the following working groups:

Topic	Membership
PRoW Severance, including Network Rail and Highways England	Barry Hall, Clare Philips, Roley Wilson

Sizewell C	Suzanne Bartlett, Barry Hall, Roley Wilson, Anthony Wright
Open Access	Barry Hall, Gordon Merfield
Coastal Erosion and Access	Barry Hall, Susan Mobbs, Roley Wilson
Planning and Development	Jane Hatton, Roley Wilson, Anthony Wright
Agri-Environment Access Schemes	David Barker, John Wayman
East Suffolk Line Community Rail Group	Margaret Hancock

Looking Ahead

53. Priorities for SLAF over the coming year include:

a) Investment in Green Access

To ensure that the high levels of use of the green access network is effectively reflected in the Council's management of public rights of way and green access.

b) Energy Schemes

To ensure that the development of energy schemes acknowledges and addresses the forum's concerns for green access.

c) Severance of Public Rights of Way

To ensure that Network Rail, National Highways, and the planning process deliver works that maintain a well-connected and easy to use green access network.

d) King Charles III England Coast Path Regional Path

To advise the county council in its discussions with Natural England, Essex, and Norfolk county councils on the form of the proposed new regional trail.

Barry Hall

Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

David Barker

Vice Chair of Suffolk Local Access Forum

August 2023

Sources of further information

The public have a right to inspect any documents included in this box – they are therefore in the public domain once the agenda is published. Background papers used in preparing the report must be kept by the report author for four years from the date of the meeting.

If there are no sources of further information, don't delete the box. Please insert the following wording:

No other documents have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this report.

a) Local Access Forums:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-access-forums-participate-in-decisions-on-public-access>

b) Suffolk Local Access Forum web pages and membership

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-forum>

c) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 27 October 2022

[2022-10-27-SLAF-Agenda-and-Meeting-Papers \(suffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-forum/2022-10-27-SLAF-Agenda-and-Meeting-Papers)

d) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 26 January 2023

[2023-01-26 SLAF Agenda and Meeting Papers \(suffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-forum/2023-01-26-SLAF-Agenda-and-Meeting-Papers)

e) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 25 April 2023

[2023-04-25 SLAF Agenda and Meeting Papers \(suffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-forum/2023-04-25-SLAF-Agenda-and-Meeting-Papers)

f) Suffolk Local Access Forum meeting 27 July 2023

[2023-07-27 SLAF Agenda and Meeting Papers \(suffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/suffolk-local-access-forum/2023-07-27-SLAF-Agenda-and-Meeting-Papers)

g) The Suffolk Green Access Strategy: Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/public-rights-of-way-in-suffolk/green-access-strategy>

Suffolk Local Access Forum – Members Details

SLAF Membership August 2022 – July 2023

The forum had 17 members during the period covered by this report.

Barry Hall (Chair) – Barry is a retired local government officer with experience of working on countryside and rights of way projects. Barry retains an interest in countryside access as a member of the RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and National Trust. *Barry has been a member of SLAF since October 2007 and Chair since January 2016.*

David Barker MBE (Vice Chair) – With his wide experience within the NFU, CLA and as a former Countryside Agency commissioner, David seeks to balance all interests in countryside access. David was also Chair of Creating the Greenest County. *David has been a member of SLAF since its inception in July 2003 and has been Vice Chair since April 2010.*

Suzanne Bartlett – Having been brought up on a farm near Framlingham, Suzanne spent most of her life living and working in Suffolk. Since retiring as a librarian, she has dedicated more time to walking and cycling in the countryside, whilst continuing as a self-employed writer and researcher. She is particularly concerned with promoting the benefits of outdoor activities for both physical health and mental well-being. *Suzanne has been a member of SLAF since October 2018.*

Christopher Bower – Chris is a keen cyclist who enjoys off-road hiking, biking, and running, exploring the natural environment, and participating in ultradistance cycling events. As a Cycling UK advocate, he has created a long-distance multi-terrain cycling route around Suffolk to encourage responsible green access and improve physical, mental, and environmental health. *Chris became a member of SLAF in April 2023.*

Margaret Hancock – Margaret is a Blue Badge Tourist Guide with a particular interest in promoting sustainable tourism. She is keen to encourage visitors to explore Suffolk by public transport, walking and cycling to benefit the local economy and preserve the peace and tranquillity of the county. Margaret has experience of supporting children and young people with disabilities, enabling them to access leisure facilities. *Margaret has been a member of SLAF since April 2010.*

Jane Hatton – Jane has always lived in Suffolk enjoying the countryside as both a horse rider and dog walker. Jane has a background in Sales and Marketing and has previously been the Sudbury Town Centre Manager. She works to improve access for the community into the countryside with an interest in promoting the benefits to health and tourism and has introduced new walks for both the Suffolk Walking Festival and Walking for Health. *Jane has been a member of SLAF since October 2013.*

Councillor James Mallinder – James is an active parish councillor in Hollesley, volunteer for 'Meet up Mondays', and treasurer of a local Good Neighbour scheme. In 2019 he entered East Suffolk Council as ward member for Deben and with an enthusiasm for the environment, held the Environment Portfolio. *James was a member of SLAF from October 2019, representing District and Borough Councils, and left the forum in July 2023.*

Gordon Merfield – With a background in agriculture, since the 1980's Gordon has been active in participating and coaching field sports events as well as being interested in the wider countryside and walking in foreign countries. *Gordon has been a member of SLAF since September 2004.*

Susan Mobbs – Susan is a walker and a cyclist mainly because of the opportunities they give her for exploring landscape, history, and nature at close hand. She is a volunteer with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, doing practical work on local reserves, and a member of the Long-Distance Walkers Association. Her professional background is in social care and social and community development, and she is keen to see improved access to the countryside and outdoor activities for people of all ages and abilities. *Susan has been a member of SLAF since October 2018.*

Clare Phillips – With a background in journalism, Clare has worked on the BBC's 'Farming Today' programme and presented countryside documentaries for BBC Radio Suffolk. Clare enjoys off-road running and walking in the Suffolk countryside, organises several Trail Races, and runs each year for her running club. She is a horse-rider and a Trustee of Ipswich Riding for the Disabled Group with experience of working with a wide range of riders with disabilities. Clare also chairs the footpaths sub-committee of Brantham Parish Council. *Clare has been a member of SLAF since October 2018.*

Monica Pipe – Monica farms just north of Ipswich and has many well-used footpaths on her land including the promoted long-distance trail, the Fynn Valley Walk. *Monica has been a member of SLAF since its inception in July 2003.*

Adrian Shepherd – Adrian is General Manager of National Trust Ickworth Estate. The Trust was founded on the principle of maintaining spaces for people to enjoy and benefit from, and this is what motivates Adrian in his work. In his professional capacity he is committed to making the estate more accessible to cyclists, walkers, and horse riders, and developing sustainable travel options to National Trust properties. Away from work, Adrian is a walking enthusiast. *Adrian has been a member of SLAF since April 2023.*

Councillor Joanna Spicer – Joanna has lived in Suffolk for over 50 years having come to live here in 1972 to work for the newly formed East Anglia Tourist Board as the Information Officer. She was first elected to Suffolk County Council in 1989 and represents the 16 rural villages of the Blackbourn Division, north-east of Bury St Edmunds. Joanna is not only a keen walker, but also works with parish councils and landowners to press for additional rights of way and green space to be a larger part of

new developments. *Joanna has been a member of SLAF since June 2022 representing Suffolk County Council.*

Jim Wayman – Jim works for a company representing east Suffolk potato farmers. He has an interest in balancing the needs of landowners and farmers with maintaining the natural beauty of Suffolk's landscapes and ensuring there is access for all to enjoy the countryside for recreation. *Jim has been a member of SLAF since April 2023.*

John Wayman – A former district council member farming in the Stour Valley, John now contributes to the wider rural picture. *John had been a member of SLAF since its inception in July 2003 and, after 20 years of service, stepped down from the forum in July 2023.*

Roley Wilson – Roley is actively involved in the promotion of the health benefits of walking for all. He has a lifelong interest in nature and open-air pursuits. During a 33-year career in the police one of his many postings involved being the Wildlife Liaison Officer for Suffolk. He is a member of the Ramblers and since retirement has spent an increasing amount of time in volunteer activities for that organisation. A keen bird watcher and member of the RSPB and Suffolk Wildlife Trust he has a passion for ensuring that everyone has free and responsible access to the countryside. *Roley has been a member of SLAF since October 2013.*

Anthony Wright – A long-term cyclist and walker, Anthony has worked with several local authorities and publishers on the production of cycling and walking guides. For 15 years before retiring Anthony worked part-time for the national sustainable transport charity Sustrans as its Area Manager for Norfolk and Suffolk, while also working part-time as a Suffolk County Council Cycling Officer. He maintains an active interest in developing cycle routes and advises the Highways Agency and Norfolk & Suffolk Highways of their responsibilities for non-motorist users' safety on the highway. *Anthony has been a member of SLAF since its inception in July 2003.*