

Luton Local Access Forum

Annual Report 2024-25

Chair's Note

This year marked the successful launch of the Luton Local Access Forum (LLAF), and I am delighted to present our first Annual Report.

We began in October 2024 by holding initial meetings to establish the forum, agree our priorities, and elect officers. I was honoured to be elected Chair, supported by Vice-Chair John Mardle, Secretary Sarah Smart, and Councillor Javed Hussain, Deputy leader and Executive Member for Highways and Sustainable Transport. Half way through the year, John stepped down but still remains an important contributing member, while Louis Upton elected as Vice Chair. We have also had continuous support from Christopher Godden and Antony Swift from Luton Borough Council (LBC). From the outset, we have benefitted from the commitment and professionalism of our members, whose range of experience and perspectives has ensured that discussions have been both insightful and constructive.

The support of LBC has been especially valuable. Officers have attended regularly, providing clear and informative presentations on key projects and policies. These briefings have enabled the Forum to offer meaningful feedback at an early stage, ensuring that access is considered in decision-making across the Luton. We very much value this collaborative relationship, which gives us the confidence that our advice is both heard and respected.

Although we are still at an early stage in our journey, the Forum has already demonstrated its ability to influence. Over the past year, we have contributed to important policy documents, reviewed proposals for major developments, and supported efforts to protect long-established rights of way. At the same time, we have played an active role in shaping emerging initiatives such as the mapping of Luton's Excluded Area, which will be a vital step in making rights of way more visible and accessible for local people.

Looking ahead, I believe the Forum's influence will grow. With more members joining, including voices that are not yet represented, such as landowners, people with disabilities, horse riders and human geography enthusiasts, we will broaden both our expertise and legitimacy. As Luton develops new versions of the Local Transport Plan, the Local Plan, and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), the LLAF will be in a strong position to provide timely, evidence-based advice.

Our ambition is clear: to ensure that access, in its widest sense, is embedded in Luton's planning and development. Whether it is shaping town-centre regeneration, improving routes for pedestrians and cyclists, or ensuring that new green spaces such as the relocated Wigmore Park serve both people and nature, the LLAF will continue to advocate for a more connected, accessible, and inclusive Luton.

This first year has laid strong foundations. With the energy and expertise of our members, and the continued support of the Council, I am confident that the LLAF will go from strength to strength and play an increasingly influential role in the years ahead.

Dr Mamnun Khan, Chair, Luton Local Access Forum

What is the Luton Local Access Forum?

Background

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty on Highway Authorities for any area to establish a Local Access Forum (LAF) for that area. In the past Luton was part of a Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) with Central Bedfordshire. Luton withdrew from the JLAF in 2022, believing that a LAF focussed on Luton would be more effective in dealing with the challenges in the Borough. Once a Rights of Way Officer (Sarah Smart) had been appointed Luton Council started the process of forming the Luton LAF.

Purpose and Goals

The main purpose of LLAF is to give advice on the improvement of public access in Luton for open-air recreation, responsible enjoyment and other related matters. The LLAF provides advice on access within the Luton Borough boundary and land outside Luton that is owned, managed or controlled by Luton.

Officers and Members

Officers

Chair: Mamnun Khan

Vice-chair: Louis Upton

Secretary: Sarah Smart

Members

Total number of LAF members (at 11 June 2025) was 12, including:

Mamnun Khan (Chair), Louis Upton (Vice Chair), Russell Cartwright, Councillor Javed Hussain, John Mardle, Roy Mccrudden, Samuel Mostyn-Willis, Cherry Newbery, David Oakley-hill, Raheed Salam, Graham Simpson and Neville Williams.

Number of members representing:

- Users of public paths and access land: 9
- Owners and occupiers of land with public paths/access land: 1
- Other interests: 2

Meetings

Minutes and meeting papers are available on [Local Access Forum on Luton.gov.uk](https://luton.gov.uk/local-access-forum)

Meetings held during 2024/25

1. 11 October 2024
2. 13 December 2024
3. 12 March 2025
4. 11 June 2025

Advice and Activity

The LAF's remit to improve public access is impacted by a broad range of activities in Luton. Here are details of some of the important things we've reviewed and given advice on.

Rights of Way

For a large Borough, Luton doesn't have many Rights of Way (RoW): less than 14 miles (about 10cm per inhabitant). There are two reasons for this: Luton is largely urban and, more importantly, when RoW were first mapped in the 50s, most of the town was "Excluded".

Luton have now started the process of mapping the Excluded Area so that paths that the public has a right to use will be visible on Ordnance Survey maps. This is an important access initiative which the LAF supports and reviews at each meeting.

Luton Policy Documents

The LAF provided detailed feedback on the initial stages of the Luton Local Plan and the Local Transport Plan.

Major Developments

Power Court: advised that the latest plans were not providing the access to the River Lea that the outline plans offered and asked for the plans to be reviewed.

The Stage: A set of plan updates for a "Non-Material Amendment" suggested that the Cycle Hub included in the project application would no longer be included. We advised that the Cycle Hub was an important part of the proposal and should not be removed without proper scrutiny.

Other Proposals Affecting Access

Paths and access land are constantly threatened by developments. One of the strengths of the LAF is that its diverse membership can spot and respond to these issues. A couple of examples over the last year:

1. A developer applied to close the Strathmore Path (a route that has been in use for well over 100 years). LAF supported Highways in opposing and the application was rejected.
2. A plan to install a planter on the New Bedford Road would have narrowed the footway to 1.2m. A LAF member contacted the proposer and plans were redrafted to give a clear 2m.

Focus for the Coming Year

To enhance the impact and long-term viability of the LAF we will:

1. Recruit more members. We aim to widen our representation by recruiting members with a disability, horse-riders, landowner representative, as well as more generally anyone who wants to help shape issues of human geography in Luton.
2. Publicise the work of the LAF more widely on LBC's website, on social media and through member networks.

LBC have started work on a new Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This document has an important interaction with the LAF's aims so we will work closely with them on this.

In addition, LBC is working on new versions of two key policy documents:

- The Local Transport Plan: consultation planned for Q4 2025
- Local Plan: consultation planned for Q1 2026

The LAF will review the consultation documents to provide detailed feedback and recommendations.

We will continue to scrutinise Major Developments to ensure that "access" is taken into account. For example:

- Major developments in the centre of town include Power Court, The Stage in Bute Street and Luton Station. These will have a big impact on access in, around and to the centre of Luton.
- At the Airport, improving “car-free” access is critical for workers as well as passengers. Development will mean “moving” Wigmore Park further from town. We need to make sure the new park is a great facility for people and nature and that there are safe, easy car-free ways to get there.

We will continue to support the project to map the Excluded Area (finding RoW and adding them to the Definitive Map). Once we have more experience with the practicalities of listing RoW, it is likely LAF will look to influence which paths should be prioritised.

We will also support Luton’s initiatives to improve access and connections to nature across our communities including the “Roots to Healthy Places” project and the river Lea linear park.