

## County Durham Local Access Forum

At a meeting of the **County Durham Local Access Forum** held at Hardwick Hall Hotel Sedgefield on **Monday 30 April 2007** at **6.30 p.m.**

**Present:**

**Steve Scoffin** in the Chair

**Members of the Forum**

Roger Cornwell, Barbara Crozier, Gael Dixon, Bob Pendlebury and William Salvin

**Officers**

Barry Charlton, Victoria Lloyd, Mike Ogden and Leah Vigars

**Observers**

Kevin Vigars (Tyne and Wear Local Access Forum)

Apologies for absence were received from Alan Dougherty, Brian Harwood, Bryan Hodgson, Geoff Hughes, Bob Kirton-Darling and David Maughan

**1. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**2. Matters Arising**

**Warcop Training Area** – William Salvin declared an interest in part of the land which forms part of the Warcop Training Area. Barry Charlton had written to MOD asking them to consider the issues discussed during the last meeting. No reply has been received and a reminder has been recently sent. It was suggested that a further reminder be sent.

**Open Access** – Mike Ogden advised that he had spoken to Natural England regarding consultation with the Forum on the review of restrictions. Natural England has bid for funding for Open Access but the position is not clear at the present time.

**3. Natural England/Defra**

**Guidance on Local Access Forums** – The Forum noted the report of the Secretary on the new regulations and the revised Defra guidance on Local Access Forums. It was explained that the Forum already met the requirements of the regulations. Additional requirements in relation to Parish Councils may well affect the Forum's workload.

**Regional Local Access Forum Letter** – Mike Ogden explained that the letter drafted by the Chair on behalf of the North East LAF's to the Chief Executive of Natural England about the lack of co-ordination had not yet been signed by all of the LAF's. It has been agreed that those LAF's who have not signed the letter will submit it to their next meeting to seek support from their respective Forum. It is expected that the letter will be signed at the next regional briefing meeting to be held in Darlington on 12 June 2007.

**Update on Regional Position** – No staff from Natural England were available to attend the meeting. Cara Courage team leader for the regional Govt Team whose remit includes ROWIP's and LAF's is due to go off on maternity leave. Stephenie Ord is the first point of contact during Natural England's transition.

#### **4. Regional Co-ordination**

**Chairs/Vice Chairs meeting on 28 March 2007** – Steve Scoffin highlighted the issues discussed at the Chairs/Vice Chairs meeting held on 28 March (for copy of minutes see file). Chris Little of One North East (ONE) gave a presentation on Tourism. ONE is seeking help to populate the desti.ne central database with accommodation providers etc. It was confirmed that there would be no funding to support statutory duties. The discussion on land management representation on Forums was deferred until the next meeting. The Forum discussed the difficulties of recruiting land management representatives.

**Training Event** – Steve Scoffin informed the Forum that he and Mike Ogden had agreed to develop proposals for a regional training event to be held later in the year. Any suggestions from Members for the training event would be welcomed.

#### **5. Feedback from Site Visit**

Roger Cornwell gave feedback from the site visit held prior to the meeting. He advised that he was impressed with the work which had included new gates and the refurbishment of a bridge. There were issues in relation to a quad bike track but it was explained that the route of the bridleway had been clearly marked. The work had cost £12,000 which had been funded from the LTP following requests from local communities. The route is only a linear at the present time but there may be potential to expand the route to provide a return route. Feed back from users of the bridleway would be helpful. The route will be promoted in co-ordination with Sedgfield Borough Council and Bishop Middleham Parish Council.

#### **6. Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

Victoria Lloyd circulated an early draft of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Victoria outlined the main aspects of the ROWIP and Members of the Forum were requested to provide feedback on the draft plan by 11 May. Any comments or suggestions should be forwarded to Steve Scoffin who will act as co-ordinator. Victoria explained that any amendments would be

incorporated into the draft plan and consultation would commence on 4 June and would run until 24 August.

## **7. Access to the Countryside Scrutiny Project**

**Update** - Mike Ogden circulated a report (for copy see file) updating the Forum on the progress made in respect of the recommendations and the current situation regarding resources.

**Land at North Bitchburn** – The Forum considered a report (for copy see file) seeking the views on whether the land was suitable for dedication.

Mike Ogden explained that there was insufficient detail on the list of sites and that it was difficult to identify the sites which are suitable for dedication. In relation to North Bitchburn there is already some unofficial use of the land taking place. The land forms part of a reclamation site and it is known that the public are using a number of routes between footpath 117 and footpath 181. Councillor Pendlebury, the local County Councillor for this site explained that the route from Valley Terrace is popular though it has been reported that it is difficult to connect paths 181 and 196 west of the dismantled railway track following the demolition of housing. He further explained that the land is already well used although the woodland at the southern end has steep gradients which are difficult to use. It was suggested that it would be helpful to reserve a right of way over the former rail track. Local knowledge is needed on the areas of the site which are used. It was proposed that informal notices could be posted on site to invite comments and suggested routes from users of the site.

William Salvin suggested that on those sites where deemed dedication was already in place, it would be a good use of resources to regularise the position before the site is disposed of. This would prevent any subsequent claims for rights of way if use/access is prohibited by the new owner.

It was agreed that it would be helpful if:

- Local groups could be approached/invited to comment and provide practical suggestions on the use of the site;
- The links on the dismantled rail track and between the existing footpaths on the site could be dedicated as rights of way;
- Similar principles could be applied on future consultations.

## **8. Access to the Coast - Update**

Mike Ogden advised that Natural England have made a series of recommendations to DEFRA to create a corridor of access along the English coastline. DEFRA will be holding a series of consultation events in the near future.

## **9. Annual Report 2006/07 and Action Plan 2007/08**

Steve Scoffin informed the Forum that following recent discussions between the Chair and Vice Chair and officers it had been proposed to change the emphasis of the annual report. It was recognised that the Forum is responsible for the production of the Annual Report with the appointing authority being responsible for the printing and publication. The annual report for 2006/07 will also include an action plan for 2007/08 and this will be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum for discussion.

## **11. Recruitment to the Forum**

Mike Ogden informed the Forum that an article had been placed in the recent issue of Countywide seeking applications for membership of the Forum. So far there had been three expressions of interest.

William Salvin offered to change category from Local Authority representative to Land Management representative if it would help the Forum to achieve balance between categories.

The Forum was informed that Fred Wright had resigned from the Forum for personal reasons.

## **12. Agenda Items for the Next Meeting**

It was suggested that it would be helpful to have a representative from Durham Wildlife Trust attend the next meeting to clarify the position in relation to Section 15 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act regarding land on Hedleyhope Fell.

The next meeting will be held at the Green House Annfield Plain at 6.00 p.m. on Monday 20 August 2007.

## **13. Tyne and Wear Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

Kevin Vigars, Access Development Officer, Tyne and Wear informed the Forum that public consultation on the Tyne and Wear ROWIP would commence from 1 May until 3 August. Copies of the document and consultation response forms are available online.