

County Durham Local Access Forum

At a meeting of the **County Durham Local Access Forum** held at County Hall Durham on **Thursday 12 January 2005** at **6.00 p.m.**

William Salvin in the Chair

Members of the Forum

Roger Cornwell, Barbara Crozier, Gael Dixon, Bryan Harwood, Geoff Hughes, Bob Kirton-Darling, David Maughan, Bob Pendlebury, Steve Scoffin and Lindsay Waddell

Officers

Barry Charlton, Mike Ogden and Jackie Salmon

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman opened the meeting welcomed everyone in attendance.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2005 were agreed as a correct record.

With reference to Minute No 5 Open Access Restrictions, Mike Ogden advised that no reply had been received from the Countryside Agency. The Authority is unable to update signage until it receives notification from the Agency. Information is also awaited from the Agency on the issue of additional funding for improvements to signage. The Secretary advised that no reply had been received from the Countryside Agency on the comments that the Forum's submitted in relation to the proposed closures.

William Salvin declared an interest in the following item of business.

In relation to Holwick Craggs, Mike Ogden informed the Forum that a management document has been agreed but has not yet been signed off.

3. Matters Arising

Dedication of County Council Land - Barry Charlton advised that he had not received a substantive reply to the Forums request for the County Council to consider dedicating appropriate land for open access. Members were of the view that the County Council as a public body should be setting an example to other landowners. It was generally felt that areas of County Council were not required for operational use and were capable of being dedicated for open access. Mike Ogden explained that information about the Countryside Agency's dedication project had been forwarded to the relevant

staff and that an application would be considered in due course. Steve Scoffin informed the Forum of a proposed project at Langley Park. A number of different organisations were involved and should the land be acquired it was intended to dedicate it for open access.

Annual Report – Jackie Salmon informed the Forum that the Annual Report for 2004/05 was now complete. Members requested a wide distribution of the report (i.e. neighbouring LAF's, District Councils etc) and suggested that feedback should be sought from recipients of the report. The report would also be available on the Forum's Internet page. Jackie advised that the report would be further developed for subsequent years.

4. Regional Local Access Forum Events

The Forum received a report of the regional local access forum event held at Newcastle on 7 October 2005 and also received feed back from colleagues who attended the event at Preston on 14 November 2005 (for copy see file).

The Minister, Jim Knight MP had attended the Preston event. Members attending the Preston event had received information on the work and the role of the Cumbria LAF.

The Countryside Agency was made aware of views of the Forums who attended the events about the need for better regional co-ordination and communication.

Mike Ogden explained that the Countryside Agency had drawn up a paper on the role of the Regional LAF Co-ordinators without consulting the officers concerned. The Regional Co-ordinators were to meet to formulate their response to the Agency.

5. Countryside Recreation Network Seminar – Sheffield 7 December 2005

The Forum considered a report of Steve Scoffin about the Countryside Recreation Network Seminar held at Sheffield 7 December 2005 on the economic value of countryside recreation (for copy see file).

Steve explained that one of main issues to arise from the seminar was the validity of economic valuations of the use of the countryside and the need to carry out proper evaluations of projects.

6. Proposed Canoe Access on the River Wear

The Forum received a presentation from Barbara Pike, Recreation Officer for the Environment Agency on canoe access on the River Wear.

The Environment Agency has a legal duty to promote recreational access to water and associated land. The Agency does not want to disadvantage the existing users or harm the environment. At the present time unless there is a

right of navigation it is necessary to obtain the adjacent landowners permission to use a river for canoeing. A landowner could dedicate access in perpetuity under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This would grant a landowner indemnity against claims in the event of an accident.

Barbara gave a brief outline of canoe activity on the River Wear. Following publication of the University of Brighton study, consultation was carried out with landowners though progress was delayed to concentrate on the River Mersey. Recently, a local land agent was appointed to negotiate with landowners and it is hoped that a voluntary access agreement can be put in place for the stretch of the river from Houghall to Finchale Priory. Landowners will be able to withdraw from the agreement if they are of the view that it is not working properly. Details were given on the working of the voluntary access agreement on the River Tyne.

In response to questions about the working of voluntary access agreements, Barbara explained that it was unlikely that the Government would change the law and grant a right of access.

Members of the Forum expressed the view that they would like to see further links to the rights of way network along riverbanks. This would benefit walkers and canoeists.

Barbara agreed to keep the Forum informed on the progress of the proposals.

The Forum thanked Barbara for her presentation.

7. Open Access - Update

The Forum received an update from Mike Ogden on Open Access on the following areas:

- The Access Management Grant Scheme for 2006/07 is likely to be limited though the Authority still needs to undertake infrastructure works.
- The North Pennines AONB is in the process of producing a second Open Access leaflet. Leaflet 2 will be targeted towards the use of YHA's and bringing visitors to the North Pennines. Brian Harwood explained that the use of the Pennine Way had fallen and that there were concerns about the viability of some of the hostels.

Mike explained that the Countryside Agency had commissioned research to evaluate use of the countryside following the introduction of Open Access. The Agency had acknowledged the deficiency of the mapping and signs and is trying to deal with this.

8. Rights of Way Improvement Plan/LTP2

Jackie Salmon explained that the main area of work at the present time is on LTP2. A progress statement on the ROWIP has been included in LTP2.

Funding for rights of way will be available as follows:-

2006/07	£60,000
2007/08	£60,000
2008/09	£110,000

In addition, funding of up to £100,000 may also be available from LSP's. The difficulty of administering the LSP funding was explained as there is insufficient staff. Members discussed seeking funding from other sources and suggested that additional funding could be sought from the following sources:

- OneNorthEast – recognition of the importance of access to the countryside plays in supporting tourism
- Sponsorship
- PCT's – walking for health
- Planning gain

Members felt it would be more beneficial to use the available funding on a pilot or demonstration project or as 'pump priming' in order to lever in additional funding. This would help demonstrate the value of the rights of way network. Members also suggested seeking sponsorship to fund work or to support posts.

Jackie also advised that the walking and cycling strategy would need to be revised. A user questionnaire is now available on the website to seek the views of those who use the rights of way network. This will be e-mailed to Forum members for their views.

9. LAF Web Page

Jackie Salmon advised the Forum that the web page was now available with a link to the ROWIP.

10 Cross Compliance

Mike Ogden informed the Forum that under the Single Farm Payment Scheme the Authority can advise the Rural Payments Agency if rights of way are obstructed. This can lead to withholding of payment by the RPA.

It was explained cases would only be reported to the RPA when the landowner/occupier had ignored advice from the County Council and the matter was being considered for prosecution.

11. Agenda Items for the next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place at 6.00 p.m. on Monday 24 April 2006 at a venue in Sedgefield.

The following areas were suggested as items for discussion at the next meeting:

- Lost Ways – Amanda Earnshaw of the Countryside may be available to attend.
- Work Programme
- Coastal Access
- Tenure ?