

County Durham Local Access Forum

At a meeting of the **County Durham Local Access Forum** held at County Hall Durham on **Monday 19 November 2007** at **6.00 p.m.**

Present:

Geoff Hughes in the Chair

Members of the Forum

Roger Cornwell, Gael Dixon, Alan Dougherty and Brian Hodgson

Officers

Barry Charlton, Audrey Christie, Brian Kitching, Victoria Lloyd and Mike Ogden

Observers

Jo Bird, Alan Pollock and Jim Welch

Apologies for absence were received from David Maughan, Bob Pendlebury William Salvin and Steve Scoffin.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 August 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. Matters Arising

Open Access - Mike Ogden informed the Forum that monitoring had been undertaken on four sites with six visits being carried out. The results have been reported to Natural England. It may be possible to undertake further monitoring in March next year

Access to the Coast – Mike Ogden advised that the Government intends to legislate to improve coastal access with the proposals likely to form part of the Marine Bill.

Access to the Countryside Scrutiny Project – In relation to the dedication of land it was felt that the Estates Division should be requested to attend the next meeting of the Forum and provide information about suitable land.

Natural England Consultation – Alan Dougherty advised that he was still awaiting the response of the British Mountaineering Council.

3. Alleygates

The Forum received a presentation from Brian Kitching, of Highway Management on alleygates (for copy see file).

Alleygates have been used for a long time particularly in urban areas. They stop burglary, fly tipping and other anti social behaviour. A British Crime survey indicated that 46% of burglaries are carried out via alley ways at the rear of properties. A recent scheme in South Wales has reduced burglary by 58% and vehicle theft by 42%.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 gives Authorities power to install alleygates which are aimed at reducing crime and fear of crime and anti social behaviour. Gating orders do not extinguish highway rights. There are specific statutory tests which must be satisfied before any gating order can be made and extensive consultations (including the Local Access Forum) must also be carried out.

Applicants need to consider whether alleygates are the most appropriate method of preventing a crime or anti social behaviour problem and whether there are alternative crime prevention methods. They will also need to provide evidence that the alley is causing the crime or anti social behaviour and have the support of their local Community Safety Partnership for the scheme if they are to be successful

In response to questions it was explained that there had not been a successful application to date. An application is unlikely to be granted if an alley is well used for access or there is no reasonable alternative route.

The Forum thanked Brian for his presentation.

4. Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Victoria Lloyd provided an update on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The ROWIP was published on the County Council website on 16th November which meets the statutory deadline of 21st November. A limited number of paper copies will be available in the near future. The ROWIP will also be available on CD and 500 copies of a summary will also be produced. Copies will be circulated to all Town and Parish Councils.

The Forum was reminded that the vision for the ROWIP is to deliver an access and rights of way network fit for the 21st Century. It was explained that the consultation exercise on the draft document took place to assess the current use of the network and that the responses had helped to shape the action plan. Work programmes will need to be produced to help deliver the action plan. A list of the ROWIP actions involving the LAF (for copy see file) was circulated.

The Forum was informed that feedback to date had been very positive. Arrangements will be made for an official launch of the ROWIP in due course.

In response to questions about the ROWIP it was explained that whilst it is a County Council document it is intended to be used to help deliver the actions in partnership with other organisations. It was confirmed that Departments within the County Council are aware of their responsibilities within the ROWIP.

The Forum congratulated Victoria for producing an excellent ROWIP and thanked her for her work. It was agreed that the ROWIP should be included on the agenda for future meetings.

5. Budget Consultation 2008/09

Mike Ogden informed the Forum that the County Council are undertaking a consultation exercise on the 2008/09 budget. The document identifies areas for investment and areas for savings. Savings of £10,000 have been identified in the rights of way budget in addition to the savings of £56,000 in 2007/08. Investment has been proposed in the Parish Paths Partnership and funding for legal costs associated with rights of way public inquiries.

It was suggested that the Secretary respond on behalf of the Forum to the budget consultation opposing any further reductions in the rights of way budget particularly in the light of the recently adopted ROWIP.

Action

That the Secretary draft a response to the budget consultation in discussion with the Chairman and Vice Chairman.

6. Regional Issues

The Forum noted the minutes of the Chairs/Vice Chairs meetings held on 4 September and 18 October and the outcome of the Regional Local Access Forum event held on 10 October 2007.

In relation to the consultations it was explained that the following regional consultations are currently underway:

- GONE - Regional Spatial Strategy
- Sport England – ‘Turning ambition into reality’
- Department of Health – ‘Better health – fairer health’

Members of the Forum were asked to pass on any views or comments on the documents to the Secretary to enable the Chairman and Vice Chairman to formulate a response. It was suggested that it may be more appropriate that a regional response be made through the LAF’s Chairs and Vice Chair meeting. Members were also asked to alert the Secretary if they are aware of any consultations which the Forum might be interested in responding to.

7. National Issues

The Forum considered a report of the Secretary about a consultation by Natural England on the LAF Handbook (for report see file). Any responses should be passed to the Secretary to enable a response to be made by 26 November.

8. Annual Report 2006/07

The Secretary informed the Forum that the Annual Report for 2006/07 was not yet available. A copy of the annual report will be circulated to the Forum as soon as it is available.

9. Recruitment to the Forum

Mike Ogden informed the Forum that eight applications had been received to join the Forum but none of them were from land owners or land managers. None of the applicants can be appointed at the present time as it will cause an imbalance in the membership. Northumbrian Water had been contacted but had not responded to the invitation to apply. It was suggested that approaches should be made to landowners such as the National Trust and the Forestry Commission to join the Forum.

10. Agenda items for the next meeting

The following items were suggested for the agenda for the next meeting:

- ROWIP and Action Plan
- Dedication of land – a representative of Estates Division to be invited to the meeting.

11. Date and time of the next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting will be held on Monday 31 March 2008 at 6.00 p.m. and that the meeting be held at the offices of Sedgefield Borough Council at Spennymoor with a presentation by Sedgefield Borough Council's Countryside Officer.

12. Section 31 Highways Act 1980

Audrey Christie informed the Forum that an electronic register under Section 31 of the Highways Act 1980 was now available on the County Councils website.

Section 31 allows landowners to deposit statements, maps and declarations as evidence of their lack of intention to dedicate their land as highways. This allows them to rebut any claims for new rights of way. At the present time

there are 65 deposits on the register. The documents need to be renewed every ten years.