

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 18 April 2016 at 6.00 pm**

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the LAF, Tom Bolton was appointed to chair the meeting.

Present: Tom Bolton (Chairman)

Members of the Forum:

Councillor Neil Foster, Ian Gray, Neil Gander, Pat Holding, Andrew Jeffrey, Angela Johnson and David Maughan

Officers:

Audrey Christie and Jill Errington

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Geoff Hughes, Robin Trounson, Geoff Rigden, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson, Jim Welch, Mike Ogden and Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 January 2016

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising

a) County Durham Plan

Councillor Neil Foster advised that consultation on the refreshed County Durham Plan would take place over the summer months with a view to identifying preferred options in the Autumn.

AGREED that the information be noted and further developments be awaited.

ACTION: The LAF continue to receive updates.

b) Durham City Sustainable Transport Strategy and Action Plan 2015-2030

Members were informed that comments received from the stakeholder consultation, including those submitted by the LAF, had been included in a revised version of the Plan which would be considered by Durham County

Council's Cabinet in May 2016. Subject to approval by Cabinet a wider public consultation would commence for 6-8 weeks.

AGREED that the LAF's response to the consultation be confirmed and further developments be awaited.

ACTION: The LAF to receive further updates on progress with the Plan.

5 Meeting with DCC - LAF Matters

Members were informed that in order to liaise with the LAF more effectively and to improve communications in future, Durham County Council's Head of Planning and Assets, Stuart Timmiss had offered to meet with up to four LAF members twice yearly to discuss any outstanding matters and any issues of mutual concern within his service areas.

With the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the LAF the first meeting was held on Thursday 7 April 2016 and members had been given an opportunity to come forward with topics for discussion.

Robin Trounson, Pat Holding, Angela Johnson and Tom Bolton attended the meeting on behalf of the LAF which discussed the outstanding matters of Common Land, dedication of land and the Heritage Coast Management Plan:-

Common Land

Tom Bolton advised that a number of actions had been agreed about the management and protection of Common Land and Village Greens. Stuart Timmiss had agreed to clarify, by way of a more defined policy, responsibility for enforcement and to clarify how common land and village greens were recorded and used internally by services in making decisions. It was also proposed to explore website links for the Council's common land and village greens webpage to show open access land, SSSIs and historic landmarks etc.

Dedication of Land

As agreed at the meeting Stuart Timmiss had provided a formal response to the LAF on the County Council's position in terms of the outstanding matter of dedication of land. The response which was circulated to members provided a position statement, clarified the particular issues with dedicating local nature reserves and suggested further discussions between DCC and the LAF to identify potential land suitable for dedication.

Heritage Coast Management Plan

Angela Johnson advised that Niall Benson had given an update at the meeting on the position with regard to the completion of the Heritage Coast Management Plan. The draft Plan was to be submitted to the Steering Group on 5 July 2016, after which it would be circulated for wider consultation. Niall Benson had offered to give a presentation on the Plan at the LAF meeting on 11 July 2016. Niall Benson had also advised that the LAF would be asked to nominate a representative to the National Trails Partnership for the England Coastal Path.

Members had felt that it was a useful first meeting and had agreed that the next meeting would be held in mid-September 2016. This would allow time to provide feedback at the October LAF meeting. Members would be given the opportunity to represent the LAF at future meetings and would be consulted in advance of each meeting to suggest potential topics for discussion.

AGREED that

- i) the response of Stuart Timmiss in relation to dedication of land be received;
- ii) the LAF continue to liaise with DCC on outstanding matters and matters of mutual concern by way of liaison meetings with Stuart Timmiss and appropriate Officers on a twice yearly basis;
- iii) the next meeting be held on a date to be agreed in mid-September 2016 and feedback be reported to the LAF at its meeting on 10 October 2016.

6 National/Regional Issues

a) LAF National Conference

Angela Johnson and Audrey Christie provided feedback from their attendance at the LAF National Conference held on 1 March 2016 in Leeds. Together with the LAF Chairman they had each provided notes from the workshops they had attended, copies of which had been circulated to members.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) 2026 cut-off date - Huddle

Neil Gander advised of a discussion posted on Huddle about the Deregulation Act and the 2026 deadline for registering unclassified and unadopted routes. Members discussed the potential implications of this in terms of identifying key routes that were currently unregistered and which may be lost. Audrey Christie advised that there would be no additional resources allocated for the Council to gather information about key routes, and it may be that there would be a reliance on volunteers, however she pointed out that there were still a lot of grey areas within the legislation which required clarification. Neil Gander asked if there could be a role for the LAF in taking this forward and he offered to place a discussion post on Huddle to find out how other LAFs may be getting involved. Angela Johnson also suggested that it may be useful to hold a training event for LAF members when the implications of the 2026 cut-off date were clarified.

AGREED that the information be noted and further progress be reported to future meetings.

ACTION:

Neil Gander to ascertain how other LAFs have been involved in securing historic routes.

Mike Ogden/Audrey Christie to arrange a training session regarding 2026 for members in due course.

c) **Access Newsletter – Issue 72**

AGREED that Issue 72 of the DEFRA Access Newsletter be received.

d) **LAF National Annual Report 2014-2015**

AGREED that the National Annual Report issued by Natural England for 2014-2015 be received.

7 Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie reported on damage to public rights of way following Storm Desmond and referred members to a list of the paths affected and the impact on the public. It was estimated that the damage caused by the storm was in the region of £1/3m and the Team was exploring the possibility of securing additional funding for repairs.

Completion of the works on the Pelaw Woods landslide had been delayed slightly due to an additional small landslip but it was hoped that the path would re-open later in the summer.

The ploughing and cropping campaign was underway.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jill Errington to e-mail the list of paths affected by Storm Desmond to all LAF members.

8 Rights of Way Improvement Plan

AGREED that as Victoria Lloyd-Gent was not in attendance an update be provided at the next meeting.

9 Access Prioritisation

Audrey Christie reported that in addition to the £50k secured from LTP further funding sources were being explored to deliver priority improvements in Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe. She was currently liaising with local Members about the possibility of securing funding for path improvements from their own neighbourhood budgets.

AGREED that the information be noted.

10 Cycling

a) **Awareness Campaign – Hedge-cutting**

It was reported that there had been no further progress made in drafting the press release. David Maughan advised that the critical time for raising awareness was before hedge-cutting commenced in August.

AGREED that the press release be drafted and submitted to the next LAF meeting for approval.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/David Maughan/Brian Hodgson.

b) **Cycling Update**

Consideration was given to the written update provided by Victoria Lloyd-Gent, a copy of which was circulated to members at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

11 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

David Maughan reported that as the Partnership was coming to an end some activities would not take place over the summer months, however overall the project had been a huge success. With over 55 miles of path improvements the Partnership had left a legacy for the future. Other Partnerships such as the Land of Oak and Iron could learn from the success of the Heart of Teesdale.

AGREED that the information be noted.

12 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership

Andrew Jeffrey, as lead member of the triumvirate of Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear LAFs reported on progress with the Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership. He advised that it was early days for the Partnership which was in the process of pulling together its Governance Team. Peter Downes had recently been appointed to the post of Access and Woodlands Officer and he was looking forward to liaising with him on the access audit. The Board was to advertise for the appointment of a community member and an independent member, both of which were voluntary roles. As agreed at the last meeting he had asked for the LAF to be represented on the Board but had been informed that this was not appropriate at this stage, however he would explore the potential of being involved with either the Steering Committee or one of the Sub-Committees. He was to attend the Tyne and Wear LAF meeting on 26 April 2016 which would provide an opportunity to meet Lisa Stephenson and Peter Downes as well as introduce himself to other LAF members.

In terms of training for LAF members, Andrew Jeffrey offered to provide a training session on his take on achieving accessibility in the public environment. This would be from the very first issues of giving the user the opportunity of choice to visit, through to the return journey home and everything in between.

AGREED that

- i) the information be noted and further progress in relation to the Land of Oak and Iron Partnership be awaited;
- ii) a training session on achieving accessibility in the public environment be arranged prior to a future meeting of the LAF.

ACTION: Andrew Jeffrey.

13 North East Local Nature Partnership

a) Update

AGREED that as the LAF Chairman was not in attendance an update be provided at the next meeting of the LAF.

b) Annual Forum

Members were informed that the Chairman had received an invitation to attend the Annual Forum of the North East LNP to be held on Thursday 16 June 2016 at the Centre of Life in Newcastle. It was hoped that there would be places for LAF members to attend the event but further information was awaited on this.

AGREED that the information be noted and further details on the event be awaited.

ACTION: Jill Errington to contact members on the receipt of any further information.

14 Bright Water Landscape Project

AGREED that as the LAF Chairman was not in attendance an update be provided at the next meeting of the LAF.

15 Pennine National Trails Partnership

Consideration was given to a written update from Mike Ogden which included the Pennine National Trails Delivery Framework for 2016-2019.

Angela Johnson welcomed the proposals but noted a small discrepancy in the delivery date for the completion of the Bridleway between Middleton Top and Ravenstonedale. Two different dates had been reported in the Framework, (2019 and 2030), and the member asked that the correct date be confirmed.

AGREED that the information be noted and Mike Ogden seek clarification with regard to the date for the completion of the Bridleway between Middleton Top and Ravenstonedale.

ACTION: Mike Ogden.

16 North Pennines AONB Partnership

a) Access and Recreation Working Group

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2016 be received.

b) **Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group**

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2016 be received.

17 Volunteering

Ian Gray reported on the work that DCC voluntary rangers were undertaking on footpaths which represented only 10% of the County's Public Rights of Way. Volunteers were keen to increase path work.

In terms of the co-ordination of volunteers and how this could be progressed it was noted that the Pennine National Delivery Framework included actions relating to the role of volunteers and which the Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group was leading on. There was therefore a potential link to the work that the LAF was considering and the Northern Working Group had identified at its meeting on 10 February 2016 that there may be scope to work with Durham LAF on this.

AGREED that the possibility of working with the Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group on the co-ordination of volunteers be explored and discussed at the next LAF meeting.

ACTION: Mike Ogden.

18 Membership and Promotion of the LAF

There was no information to report in relation to membership and promotion of the LAF.

19 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

The Chairman reported the receipt of the following open access restrictions:-

Hamsterley Common – No public access for public safety - 9 February 2016

Sharnberry – No public access for public safety reasons – 28 January 2016 to 31 March 2016

Red Gill Moss – Dog Exclusion Order to protect moorland birds – 22 May 2016 to 21 May 2021.

Members were provided with a copy of each Notice at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

20 Work Programme/Targets and Outputs

AGREED that the Work Programme, which had been updated following the last meeting, be noted.

21 Annual Report 2015/2016

Tom Bolton reported that as agreed at the last meeting, members had been asked to provide a summary of their own work areas, together with a brief explanation of what had been achieved in the year and any aims for 2016/17, for inclusion in this year's Annual Report. Members had also been asked to consider their own details in the membership section of the Report and provide an update if necessary.

AGREED that the information for the Annual Report 2015-2016 be provided to the LAF Secretary by no later than Friday 27 May 2016.

ACTION: All members to action.

22 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the AGM be held on Monday 11 July 2016 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham.

23 Any Other Business

DCC Consultation – Statement of Community Involvement

Tom Bolton reported that the LAF had been consulted on Durham County Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI detailed how local communities and other interested parties could play a role in the planning process including the County Durham Plan and planning applications. The SCI also provided advice to Town and Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Forums on how to involve local people and groups in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.

AGREED that the LAF Chairman examine the document and submit any comments he may have on behalf of the LAF by the response deadline of 13 May 2016.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes.