

COUNTY DURHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 24 April 2017 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes (Chairman)

Members of the Forum:

Tom Bolton, Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, Pat Holding, Angela Johnson, Geoff Rigden and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Audrey Christie and Jill Errington

Also present:

Tammy Morris-Hale – Senior Ecologist, DCC
Zoe Thirlaway – Senior Policy Officer, DCC

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chairman welcomed Tammy Morris-Hale, Senior Ecologist and Zoe Thirlaway, Senior Policy Officer, Durham County Council. Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors Neil Foster and Eddie Tomlinson, David Maughan, Steve Scoffin and Robin Trounson.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Green Infrastructure Strategy

Members received a presentation from Tammy Morris-Hale and Zoe Thirlaway on the County Durham Green Infrastructure Strategy (GI Strategy), the network of open spaces and countryside that surrounded towns and villages, and permeated through built areas.

The existing strategy utilised the Open Spaces Needs Assessment 2010 (OSNA) to identify areas for improvement and enhancement, such as allotments, amenity open space, semi natural greenspace and parks and gardens. The Strategy provided a framework to access funding, although where funding could be focussed was limited to those spaces in Council ownership.

A revised OSNA was due in 2017 with a view to updating the Green Infrastructure Strategy later in the year.

In terms of its links with access, the GI Strategy promoted walking and cycling and aimed to identify gaps in the existing network that could be addressed.

Zoe Thirlaway explained that the Strategy also acted as a basis for planning policy. New developments were now required to include open space provision, or contributions towards off-site provision, and these were informed by the OSNA. Examples included Mount Oswald golf course which included on site public open space/community play park and a network of open space linked by pedestrian routes. At Chilton a contribution was required from the developer towards outdoor sport space and allotments, and towards biodiversity improvement projects.

Angela Johnson asked about the use of Section 106 monies for creating new Rights of Way. Zoe Thirlaway advised that the new County Durham Plan would allow improved negotiations with developers but it was very important to have strong policies within the Plan which would support requests for new Rights of Way on development sites.

Following a question from Tom Bolton, Zoe Thirlaway confirmed that the revised OSNA would be presented to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chairman commented that County Durham had large areas of mown open space which if left could create wildlife habitats. Tammy Morris-Hale explained that Ecologists were working with the Clean and Green Teams to encourage more wildflower areas across the County. This linked to the Habitat Regulation Assessment in the County Durham Plan.

Following discussion the Chairman thanked the Officers for their attendance and it was **AGREED** that the information be noted.

4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2017

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

5 Matters Arising

a) **County Durham Plan**

See minute numbered 3. Zoe Thirlaway informed Members that due to the period of purdah before the elections there was no progress to report in relation to the County Durham Plan.

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

ACTION: Robin Trounson to continue to provide updates.

b) **Consultation – Draft Durham City Neighbourhood Plan**

AGREED that the LAF's response to the draft Durham City Neighbourhood Plan be noted.

ACTION: Robin Trounson to continue to provide updates.

c) **Heritage Coast Management Plan 2017-2025**

Angela Johnson informed members that Niall Benson had sent the final draft Plan to the Heritage Coast Steering Group for approval in July 2017. He was currently finalising the matrix of comments on the Plan and would respond formally to the LAF in May.

AGREED that the information be noted and the final Plan be awaited.

ACTION: Angela Johnson to continue to provide updates.

d) **Joint LAF Summer Site Visit – Lambton Estate and Fatfield Bridge**

AGREED that the letter to Tyne and Wear LAF regarding the works carried out on the Durham side of the Weardale Way, be noted.

e) **Teesdale Way – Website**

Consideration was given to the written update provided by David Maughan which advised that the project had come to a standstill due to the Lead Officer leaving the River Tees Rediscovered project. However he hoped that whoever was appointed to the position would be encouraged to continue the work in future. The students at Durham University had made some progress with the development of the website which would be kept on hold until work on the project resumed.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: David Maughan to continue to represent the LAF on the Teesdale Website Group if/when work on the project resumes.

f) **De-Regulation Act**

Neil Gander asked if there was an update in relation to the De-Regulation Act. Mike Ogden advised that there had been no further progress, and did not expect the Act to come into effect until April 2018 at the earliest.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden and Audrey Christie to provide updates on progress with implementation of the Act.

6 National/Regional Issues

a) **Natural England – Conservation 21**

The Chairman referred Members to Natural England's Conservation Strategy for the 21st Century which set out how Natural England would work to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy.

AGREED that Conservation 21 be received.

b) **Regional Priorities**

Geoff Hughes reported that the Regional LAF Chairs meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 4 May 2017 at 2pm at Hexham.

AGREED that in the absence of the Chairman, Vice-Chair Angela Johnson attend the meeting.

ACTION: Angela Johnson to provide feedback from the Regional meeting.

c) **LAF National Conference – 21 June 2017**

The Chairman sought nominations for a member to attend the LAF National Conference on Wednesday 21 June 2017 at Birmingham. Details of the event had been circulated to members.

AGREED that Tom Bolton attend the LAF National Conference 2017.

ACTION: Jill Errington to book place and sort travel arrangements.

d) **DEFRA Access Newsletter**

AGREED that DEFRA Access Newsletter Issue 79 be received.

7 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie reported that the Pelaw Wood restoration project was due to finish in June 2017, and following completion, work on other areas of flood damage would commence, with one of the first projects being Slitt Wood at Westgate.

The ploughing and cropping campaign was underway and she was pleased to report that this had been successful with a high compliance rate among farmers.

Other highlights included:-

-) A Creation Agreement for a path at Sherburn House.
-) A Permissive Agreement at Holbeck House, along the River Wear at Frosterley to create an improved diversion.
-) A modification order had been agreed by the Council's Highways Committee to add a disputed path at Howden-le-Wear to the Definitive Map as a bridleway.

Neil Gander added that the Highways Committee had also agreed a modification order to record 2 routes at Salters Gate and High Stoop restricted byways.

AGREED that the information be noted.

8 Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Consideration was given to the written update provided by Victoria Lloyd-Gent which gave details of capital schemes and spend for 2017/2018.

AGREED that the information be noted.

9 Access Prioritisation

Audrey Christie reported that delivery of Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Aycliffe improvements were coming to an end, and new audits would be explored, subject to funding being secured.

AGREED that the information be noted.

10 Cycling

a) Update

Consideration was given to the written update provided by Victoria Lloyd-Gent which informed Members of progress with the following:-

-) Cycling Strategy
-) Cycling Network Planning
-) Great North Cycleway
-) Bike Repair Stations
-) Cycle Parking
-) Cycling improvement schemes
-) 2017/2018 Infrastructure programme
-) Town Cycling Maps

Neil Gander added that Victoria would be moving to a new Team within Transport in May 2017. The Cycle Network Planning Officer's contract had come to an end and he did not know how this would impact upon the work to promote cycling.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) Rides of Way Cycle Report 2017

Neil Gander took members through Cycling UK's Off-Road Report produced following a survey of cyclists which had received 11,500 responses.

Neil Gander highlighted from the report that one third of cyclists rode on public footpaths and on paths whose status was not known. The report stated that cyclists did so because of a lack of choice or convenience, and considered the law to be outdated. Three quarters of those surveyed felt that the Rights of Way network was unsuitable. Cycling UK sought to open up the network for cyclists as had been introduced in Scotland, which would allow Councils and other organisations to promote routes best suited for cycling.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that the report be received.

11 Lost Ways - Research for 2026 Cut-Off Date

Members were informed that Steve Scoffin had attended a 'Restoring the Record' training event on 4 March 2017. Angela Johnson was to arrange a further meeting

of the Lost Ways Sub-Group in the Autumn to continue exploring potential routes, and it was suggested that the invitation to the meeting be extended to any interested member.

With regard to auditing the List of Streets Audrey Christie advised that she would explore how the List was maintained with colleagues in the Highways Section, and report back to the Lost Ways Sub-Group.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION:

1. Angela Johnson to arrange meeting of the Lost Ways Sub-Group in Autumn 2017.
2. Audrey Christie to liaise with the Highways Section on how the List of Streets was maintained.

12 Common Land

Tom Bolton reported that work had commenced to make village green data available to the public on the Council's website. Searches would be carried out with the Land Registry to establish the ownership status of those areas of Common Land and Village Greens that were unclaimed or vested in the Council, and it was hoped to have this completed by the end of August 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to continue to provide updates.

13 Dedication of Land

At the DCC/LAF Liaison meeting on 24 January 2017 Stuart Timmiss had offered to set up a Working Group to explore the issue of dedication. The proposal was for the Working Group to meet twice, and the first would be a scoping meeting which was scheduled for Wednesday 26 April 2017. Pat Holding and Tom Bolton had agreed to attend.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Pat Holding and Tom Bolton to provide feedback from the Working Group.

14 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership (LOI)

Consideration was given to the reports of Jim Welch which provided feedback from the LOI Conference held on 1 April 2017, of his meeting with Kath Marshall-Ivens on 15 March 2017 and of proposals for a late summer festival on 16 September 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jim Welch to continue to provide updates.

15 North East Local Nature Partnership

a) Update

The Chairman reported that an Executive meeting was scheduled for Thursday 27 April 2017 which he would attend and provide feedback at the next LAF meeting.

b) Vision for Environmental Growth

The Chairman advised that comments had been invited on the North East of England Partnership's draft document Vision for Environmental Growth. He had proposed minor amendments to the document which had been forwarded to the LNP.

c) LNP Conference

Consideration was given to the paper by Robin Trounson which provided feedback from his attendance at the LNP Conference held on 28 February 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted, and the response to the draft Vision for Environmental Growth be confirmed.

ACTION: The Chairman to continue to provide updates.

16 Bright Water Landscape Project

The Chairman provided an update on progress with the delivery of the Bright Water Landscape Project. At a meeting he had attended the previous week he had been impressed by archaeological proposals to reveal the heritage of the area. Proposed schemes included the creation of new fen, improved links to multi-user routes and extending the Rights of Way Network to the National Railway Museum. Subject to securing the £3m bid for Heritage Lottery Funding, a Team of Officers would be recruited to implement the project.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: The Chairman to continue to provide updates.

17 Pennine National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden informed Members of a trial volunteer project known as Pennine Way People which involved 22 individuals/pairs of volunteers who had each adopted a section of the Pennine Way. The volunteers also took part in practical work parties.

The Partnership was in negotiations with three breweries to produce an official beer for the Pennine Way which would raise money for the maintenance of the trails.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to continue to provide updates.

18 Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership

The LAF had responded to the LNP's request for projects which it could support, and had suggested the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway National Trails, and the proposed Tees-Swale project. Two other LAFs had put forward suggestions, one of which included examining the condition of access signs. This would be of interest to Durham County Council, given the condition of signage across the County.

AGREED that information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to continue to provide updates.

19 Health

Consideration was given to the paper by Robin Trounson which provided feedback from his attendance at the Healthy Weight Alliance Group on 17 February 2017.

The Chairman informed Members that Julie Russell, Strategic Manager for Culture and Sport had been unable to attend the LAF meeting to discuss the Physical Activity Framework, however had indicated that an Officer would be available for the next meeting in July.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: LAF Secretary to invite Julie Russell or a representative to the next meeting.

20 North Pennines AONB Partnership

a) North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group

It was noted that the LAF was not represented at the meeting.

AGREED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2017 be received.

b) North Pennines AONB Partnership Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group

It was noted that the LAF was not represented at the meeting.

AGREED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2017 be received.

21 Press Release - Sheep Worrying

Members were informed that the press release drafted by Brian Hodgson had been circulated to all of Durham County Council's media contacts. It was suggested that the press release be issued annually and included in Durham County News.

Angela Johnson advised that a 6 month initiative had been launched in the House of Lords involving rural Police forces to gather details about dog attacks on livestock. An initial report was expected in September.

AGREED that the press release be noted and released on an annual basis to media contacts and in County Durham News.

ACTION: LAF Secretary to discuss the inclusion of an article in Durham County News with the Corporate Communications Team.

22 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

There were no open access restrictions to report.

23 Annual Report 2016-2017

Consideration was given to the report of Robin Trounson in relation to the Annual Report for 2016/2017. Members were asked to provide a single brief paragraph summarising the nature of the work, highlights or developments over the past 12 months, and any plans, hopes or expectations for the forthcoming year. The report aligned the work streams to individual LAF members.

AGREED that the alignment of members and reporting as listed in the report be confirmed, and information for the Annual Report 2016-2017 be provided to the LAF Secretary by no later than Friday 2 June 2017. Durham Voice to be added to the report's circulation list.

ACTION: All to action. LAF Secretary to remind members to return the information in advance of the deadline.

24 Work Programme/Tasks and Targets

AGREED that members update their own work areas as necessary and forward to the LAF Secretary to update the Work Programme.

ACTION: All to consider.

25 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the AGM be held on Monday 17 July 2017 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham.