

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 9 October 2017 at 6.00 pm**

Present:

Robin Trounson (Chair)

Tom Bolton, Pat Holding, Angela Johnson, Councillor Ossie Johnson, Councillor Carl Marshall, Geoff Rigden. Steve Scoffin, Peter Singer and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Audrey Christie, Victoria Lloyd-Gent and Jill Errington

Observers:

Colin Hemingway
John Sturdy

Not Present:

Neil Gander and Brian Hodgson

1 Election of Chair

Robin Trounson sought nominations for the election of a LAF Chair for the Forum for the ensuing year.

There were no nominations and it was therefore **AGREED** that the current arrangements should continue. Robin Trounson, Vice-Chair had agreed to chair the meeting, and to facilitate business would remain as Chair until the next meeting of the Forum.

2 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Marshall, newly appointed member Peter Singer, and observers Tow Law Town Councillor Colin Hemingway and John Sturdy.

Apologies for absence were received from Geoff Hughes and David Maughan.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

5 Matters Arising

a) County Durham Plan

Councillor Marshall advised that the awaited Government Consultation proposals for 'Planning for the Rights Homes in the Right Places' had now been received. Proposed housing figures for Durham were slightly lower than predicted but broadly in line with what was being developed across the County. He expected a report to be submitted to Cabinet before the end of the year which would kick-start a new consultation process. As part of the process the LAF would be asked to participate in a workshop to consider matters relating to access.

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

b) Heritage Coast Management Plan 2017-2025

Angela Johnson provided background to the Heritage Coast which extended from Sunderland to Hartlepool, and outlined the aims of the Management Plan for 2017-2025 to protect and manage the coastline. The LAF had submitted detailed comments on the draft Plan which had been scheduled for consideration by the Heritage Coast Steering Group in September but which would now be reported in December 2017.

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

ACTION: Angela Johnson to continue to provide updates.

c) DCC/LAF Liaison Meeting

Robin Trounson reported that as there were no topics suggested by LAF members or Stuart Timmiss for the DCC/LAF Liaison meeting scheduled to be held on 6 October 2017, the meeting had been cancelled. Members were reminded that the meeting was an opportunity for both members and Durham County Council to raise matters that were relevant to the work of the LAF. Issues that had been raised previously included dedication of land, common land and the County Durham Plan.

The liaison meetings were scheduled to be held twice a year and it was therefore **AGREED** that the next meeting be arranged in advance of the April meeting of the LAF. Potential topics be discussed at the January LAF meeting.

ACTION: Jill Errington to arrange a date for the DCC/LAF Liaison meeting. All to consider potential topics.

d) Annual Report 2016/2017

Robin Trounson advised that the LAF Annual Report had been circulated more widely than in previous years to raise the profile of the Forum. This had generated interest from Tow Law Town Councillor Colin Hemingway who

was in attendance as an observer and who was interested in becoming a member of the Forum.

AGREED that the information be noted.

6 National/Regional Issues

a) Natural England

Robin Trounson advised that there was no update from Natural England to report. Members were informed that support from Natural England had reduced in recent years due to budget and resource pressures and this had prompted LAFs to examine how they could support each other on a regional basis. Support from Natural England was to be discussed at the North East LAF Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting on 12 October 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) North East Regional Chairs and Vice-Chairs

Robin Trounson reported that he would attend the Regional meeting to be held on 12 October 2017 at 1.30pm in County Hall, Durham. Items for discussion included the NECA Transport Plan, regional ROWIP priorities, relationship with Natural England and DEFRA, regional press releases and planning training.

AGREED that the information be noted and feedback from the meeting be provided at the next meeting of the LAF.

ACTION: Robin Trounson.

c) Northumbrian Water – Regional Thinking Ahead Workshop

Angela Johnson provided feedback from the workshop she had attended on 27 September 2017 which was hosted by Northumbrian Water. The purpose of the workshop was to develop partnership working on flood plans and environmental issues such as conservation. Northumbrian Water was keen to tap into all local partnerships. This was one of a series of catchment workshops with a view to a regional workshop being held to develop a 5 year Business Plan 2020-2025 with partners.

Northumbrian Water had 62 volunteer rangers in the region who inspected watercourses, and paths and byways close to water for obstructions, and who then reported any issues to Rights of Way Officers. The volunteers also inspected access routes in areas such as Derwent Reservoir. Mike Ogden advised that the Rights of Way Team were unaware of the existence of the rangers and had not received any reports to date. Steve Scoffin suggested inviting Northumbrian Water to a future meeting of the LAF to discuss the work of the rangers and how their work should link to the Rights of Way Team.

Angela Johnson continued that she had attended a session at the Workshop which discussed flood tables and noted that Northumbrian Water did not

have any links with Parish Councils, who would be able to advise about areas of localised flooding.

AGREED that the information given be noted and Northumbrian Water be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum to discuss the work of the volunteer rangers.

ACTION: Angela Johnson to attend any further workshops. Jill Errington to invite Northumbrian Water to the next meeting.

7 Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie provided an update in relation to the work of the Rights of Way Team.

Members were informed that works at Slitt Wood at Westgate had been completed and a celebration event would be held in Spring 2018. Works had also been completed to paths next to the River Wear at St John's Chapel and Frosterley. Riverbank repair works at Maiden Castle to the rear of the Rugby Club were ongoing and as part of the University development improvements were proposed to the riverside path, as the walking route along the A177 had limited capacity. Early discussions were taking place with Weardale Railway to create a footpath next to the line at Holbeck.

The British Horse Society had been researching old records ahead of the 2026 deadline to register lost ways, and had lodged 2 applications for modification orders at Bearpark and Hagg Lane, Byers Green.

The date for the Public Inquiry in connection with a Modification Order to add a disputed path to the Definitive Map as a bridleway at the Howden-le-Wear to Wear Valley Junction, was awaited.

AGREED that the information be noted.

8 Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Tom Bolton advised that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) was a statutory document which set out the Council's vision for the path network over a three year period. The existing ROWIP was due to come to an end in 2018 and a meeting of the LAF Sub-Group would be arranged to discuss the future of the Plan beyond next year.

AGREED that a meeting of the Sub-Group be arranged early 2018.

ACTION: Tom Bolton/Geoff Rigden/Jim Welch/Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

9 Access Prioritisation

The Access Prioritisation project aimed to improve and promote the access network. The LAF had suggested including a study of networks in the locations

identified as actions in the ROWIP. The Council now had a robust process to carry out audits and prioritise improvements to paths in specific locations, subject to funding. The project was due for renewal and a change in focus was required due to funding availability. It may be possible to secure funding through the inclusion of projects which tackled health deprivation.

AGREED that the information be noted and a meeting of the Sub-Group be arranged in due course.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Jim Welch/Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

10 Cycling Strategy

Victoria Lloyd-Gent informed members that she hoped that the Strategy would go out to public consultation later this calendar year with a view to it being published in the first quarter of 2018.

Progress on assessing the cycle network in the 12 main towns had paused as the Section had lost a staff resource. A bid had been submitted for technical support from the Department of Transport but unfortunately this had been unsuccessful. She was therefore looking at how the Council could work with Consultants involved with NECA's proposed Walking and Cycling Strategy.

Members were informed of a partnership project in Durham City. 'Unicycle' was a partnership between DCC, the University, Durham Constabulary, Cycling UK, Breeze, Living Streets and Recyke Y'Bike and was aimed at student safety. The scheme provided equipment and guided rides.

Other work included cycling links at the Thorne Factory, Spennymoor, Salters Lane, and Rotary Way at Pity Me. The links to Durham Station were now open on both sides of the road.

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

ACTION: Neil Gander/Geoff Rigden/Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

11 Dedication of Land

By way of background members were informed that the CROW Act 2000 enabled landowners to dedicate land for open access in perpetuity. At the request of the LAF Durham County Council had dedicated land at Walldridge Fell and South Moor and the LAF had now asked the Council to consider exploring other potential sites for dedication. Following a Working Group involving Pat Holding and Tom Bolton, Stuart Timmiss had agreed to focus on the feasibility of dedicating sites at Seaham, Stanley and Shildon. Officers had been working on a methodology for considering potential sites and also other options for providing open access. For example the Woodland Trust provided permissive sites which were shown on OS maps. A further meeting of the Working Group would be convened to discuss options.

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

ACTION: Pat Holding.

12 Lost Ways

a) **Lost Ways Sub-Group**

Angela Johnson provided background to the work of the Sub-Group and feedback from the meeting held on 4 October 2017. Sue Rogers of the British Horse Society (BHS) had drawn up a list of 20 potential sites, and DCC had provided a list of Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) as a starting point for the Sub-Group to consider. From this information the Sub-Group produced a list of those they considered should be pursued. Members who were aware of any specific routes that they felt should be included were asked to notify the Sub-Group.

Angela Johnson suggested that the Rights of Way Team purchase copies of the new edition of 'Rights of Way: Restoring the Record' by Phil Wadey. The book was a useful publication which would assist the LAF and the Rights of Way Team in future.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Sub-Group to progress.

b) **Auditing the List of Streets**

Audrey Christie advised that any routes on the Highway Authority's List of Streets were exempted from the 2026 legislation and could not be extinguished. The BHS had asked if routes could be put on the List of Streets to prevent them being lost but there were some issues around whether this would be legally sound. Audrey Christie advised that she would discuss the matter further with Angela Johnson and respond to the BHS.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Audrey Christie to respond to the BHS.

13 Common Land and Village Greens

Tom Bolton provided members with background to common land and village greens and explained that Durham County Council as the Commons Registration Authority had responsibility for maintaining the registers of common land and village greens. In consultation with the Council some work had been carried out to establish ownership of those commons and greens which according to the Registers were in unknown ownership at the time of registration in the late 1960s. Members were advised that this work had now been completed and the process had revealed that ownership of some areas of common land and village greens had been registered with the Land Registry.

Work was also ongoing to include village green maps on the Council's website. It had proved more difficult than expected because of the age of the original register maps and this had delayed progress, but work was ongoing.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to continue to provide updates.

14 North East of England Nature Partnership

In the absence of Geoff Hughes, consideration was given to two updates in relation to the North East England Nature Partnership, copies of which were circulated to Members. It was noted that the information provided by Natural England covered the whole of the Region and was not NEENP specific.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes to continue to provide updates.

15 Bright Water Landscape Project

In the absence of Geoff Hughes, Robin Trounson provided a verbal update in relation to the Bright Water Project, a heritage conservation project around the River Skerne catchment area. A decision on the submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £3.2m to carry out a range of works including significant access improvements was expected in March 2018. Geoff Hughes had been appointed as Chair of the Delivery Phase Partnership Board to represent County Durham and Tees Valley LAFs. The Collaborative Agreement between the partners had now been signed.

AGREED that the information be noted and the appointment of Geoff Hughes as representative on the Delivery Phase Partnership Board be confirmed.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes to continue to provide updates.

16 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership

Consideration was given to the update provided by Jim Welch in respect of the Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership, a copy of which was circulated to members.

Councillor Johnson advised that the new Visitor Centre at Winlaton Mill had a high profile launch and did very well in raising grant funding.

In response to a comment from Robin Trounson, Mike Ogden advised that there had been discussions about what could be done in terms of signage so that visitors would be aware that they were in the Land of Oak and Iron.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jim Welch to continue to keep members informed of progress and the update be provided to Tyne and Wear LAF.

17 Health

Jim Welch provided feedback from the County Durham Healthy Weight Alliance meeting he had attended on 19 September 2017. The LAF was represented on the Group which was made up of health and education professionals, and which reflected the national concern about the health of the nation, particularly in relation to tackling obesity. There were a number of initiatives to tackle health issues, such as Walking for Life but if the infrastructure for exercise was not in place then initiatives such as this would not be successful. As had been reported there may be opportunities to secure funding for access prioritisation projects.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jim Welch to continue to provide updates.

18 Pennine National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden informed members that the Partnership had secured funding from Visit England to promote tourism on the Pennine Way, which included the offer of walking packages for visitors.

The next meeting of the Partnership was to be held on 1 November 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to continue to provide updates.

19 North Pennines AONB Partnership

North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group and Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the Working Groups held on 15 June 2017, copies of which were circulated to Members.

AGREED that the Minutes be received.

The next meetings were to be held on 8 November 2017 at The Sill in Northumberland with the Access and Recreation Working Group meeting jointly with the AONB Tourism Working Group for the first time.

Robin Trounson sought a volunteer from the membership to substitute for Neil Gander in the event that he could not attend any meetings.

AGREED that Peter Singer be appointed as substitute for Neil Gander at meetings of the North Pennines AONB Partnership Working Group meetings.

FURTHER AGREED that Peter Singer attend the next meeting with Neil Gander to familiarise himself with the work of the Groups.

20 LAF Press Releases

Members were informed that the LAF had previously issued two press releases; advice to dog owners about sheep worrying, and a request for landowners to protect cyclists and other path users when hedge-cutting.

The issue of press releases was a subject for discussion at the North East Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting on 12 October 2017.

AGREED that the information be noted and consideration be given to the re-issue of the press releases in 2018 at the next LAF meeting.

ACTION: Jill Errington to e-mail press releases to members for information.

21 Member Training Needs

Members were asked to consider any training needs relevant to the work of the LAF.

It was suggested that as part of induction training for new members a visit to the Rights of Way Team would be useful.

AGREED that arrangements be made for new member Peter Singer and any other interested members to visit the Rights of Way Team.

22 Membership Update

It was noted that in addition to the newly appointed member Peter Singer, Councillor Colin Hemingway and John Sturdy were interested in joining the LAF.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to forward application details.

23 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

Robin Trounson informed members that there were no notifications received from Natural England of access restrictions in the quarter.

24 Work Programme/Targets and Outputs

AGREED that the Work Programme be updated to include Peter Singer as substitute member for the North Pennines AONB Partnership Working Groups.

25 Future Meeting Dates

The meeting dates for 2018 were **AGREED** as follows:-

Monday 22 January 2018

Monday 23 April 2018

Monday 16 July 208

Monday 15 October 2018.

All meetings to commence at 6.00pm and usually held in County Hall, Durham.