

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham on **Monday 23 April 2018 at 6.00 pm**

Present:

Pat Holding - Chair

Members:

Colin Hemingway, Brian Hodgson, Geoff Hughes, Angela Johnson, Councillor Ossie Johnson, Councillor Carl Marshall, David Maughan, Steve Scoffin and Peter Singer

Also Present:

Vicky Cairns, External Communications Consultant, Northumbrian Water

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Vicky Cairns from Northumbrian Water.

Apologies for absence were received from LAF members Tom Bolton, Neil Gander, Geoff Rigden, John Sturdy, Robin Trounson and Jim Welch, and Officers Audrey Christie and Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

2 Water Rangers

Vicky Cairns gave a presentation to members on the water rangers initiative, a team of 75 volunteers who looked after 56 routes across the north east region from Ashington in the north to Darlington in the south. The rangers monitored the condition of watercourses and reported pollution threats. Third party issues reported by the rangers were passed on to the relevant agencies.

Geoff Hughes asked how routes were selected and how footpath problems were handled.

Vicky Cairns advised that hotspots were identified by Northumbrian Water's Tech Support Team and from key partners such as the Rivers Trust. Footpath problems spotted by the water rangers were logged and reported to the relevant Council, although she appreciated that this arrangement could be improved.

Following a question from Brian Hodgson members were informed that problems which caused a flood risk may be dealt with by Northumbrian Water or passed onto the Environment Agency as the responsible authority. She hoped to improve joint working with the Environment Agency's volunteer rangers and others in future.

In response to a question from Peter Singer the LAF was informed that whilst there were no routes on the Upper Tees the long-term aim was to have a ranger in every

community. There was no minimum length of water course that a ranger could patrol.

David Maughan asked if there was an increase in pollution following heavy rainfall and Vicky Cairns confirmed this to be the case. Northumbrian Water hoped to work with farmers to look at ways of reducing the risk of pollution from products such as fertiliser.

Members discussed how the LAF could support the work of the water rangers and as a starting point it was **AGREED** that Vicky Cairns share the water rangers' quarterly newsletter with the LAF, and the LAF's Annual Report for 2017/2018 be provided in return.

AGREED that the information be noted.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

5 Matters Arising

a) County Durham Plan

Councillor Marshall provided an update in relation to the County Durham Plan. The draft Plan would be reported to Cabinet on 13 June 2018, at which point a six week consultation on the preferred options would commence. A LAF workshop was proposed for members in July which would include how the Plan tied in to the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

In response to a question from Brian Hodgson, Councillor Marshall advised that all new developments were required to produce an evidence base which included infrastructure arrangements.

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

b) NECA Transport Plan: Walking and Cycling Strategy

Consideration was given to the report of Neil Gander following his attendance at the Tyne and Wear JLAF meeting on 23 January 2018 which heard from NECA on progress with the Regional Transport Plan and the Cycling and Walking Strategy.

AGREED that the information be noted.

c) **Huddle**

It was reported that Natural England was increasingly using Huddle as a communication tool for the LAFs. Members discussed the future use of Huddle and it was suggested that an additional member be appointed as a LAF Huddle 'Champion'.

AGREED that arrangements be made for Steve Scoffin to be granted access to Huddle.

ACTION: Jill Errington to arrange access with Natural England.

d) **Coastal Access – Network Rail Proposals**

Angela Johnson provided feedback from the site visit held on 6 February 2018 with Network Rail and other interested parties to discuss Network Rail's proposals to close footpath level crossing Hawthorn Hive and the construction of a new footbridge to allow access to the beach. Whilst the reasons for the level crossing closure were valid the feasibility of the construction of the footbridge was to be explored, and any path closure would be subject to a formal consultation exercise.

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

ACTION: Angela Johnson keep members informed of developments.

6 National/Regional Issues

a) **Regional Chairs and Vice-Chairs Meeting**

AGREED that Angela Johnson's attendance at the next regional Chairs/Vice-Chairs meeting on 3 May 2018 be confirmed.

b) **Great North Exhibition 2018**

Members were informed that the LAF had been approached by Northumberland JLAF to consider opportunities to lend support to any projects which celebrated access to the countryside as part of the Great North Exhibition 2018, and the matter was to be discussed at the next Regional LAF Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting. North Pennines AONB Partnership had advised that it was presenting the art installation at Low Force, but the Heritage Coast and Visit Durham had no plans for specific events, as the exhibition was very much Newcastle and Gateshead focused.

AGREED that the information be noted.

c) **Highways Agency – Non-motorised Users Workshop – A66 North Trans-Pennine Route**

David Maughan provided feedback from his attendance at the Highways Agency workshop to discuss the A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project. The member was pleased that the Highways Agency were consulting with user groups such as LAFs and the BHS at this early stage, and a further meeting was to be held in June which he hoped to attend.

In discussing the proposals it was noted that there would be a number of Rights of Ways affected and it would be useful to identify the routes before the next meeting of the project.

AGREED that Mike Ogden meet with David Maughan and Peter Singer to identify Rights of Way affected by the project, and both members attend the next A66 project workshop.

ACTION: Mike Ogden/David Maughan/Peter Singer.

7 Rights of Way Team

Mike Ogden reported that last year £316k of funding had been accessed over and above the maintenance budget for footpath works from LTP, S106, LNP and Heritage Lottery. £66K was remaining to spend on paths damaged by Storm Desmond.

Angela Johnson made reference to proposals for an access route on a housing development at Park Hill, Bowburn and noted that construction on site had commenced. Mike Ogden advised that he would investigate if the access route was included as a planning condition and report to the member directly.

AGREED that the information be noted.

8 County Durham's Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan

Consideration was given to the update in respect of the implementation of the Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan, a copy of which had been circulated.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Neil Gander/Geoff Rigden to continue to provide updates.

9 Lost Ways - Restoring the Record

Angela Johnson advised that she would contact the Sub-Group to establish if there was a need for a further meeting at this point. She was pleased to report that the BHS had offered to contribute towards Neil Gander's expenses for the research he was undertaking.

AGREED that a letter be sent thanking the BHS for agreeing to reimburse expenses for Neil Gander's research.

ACTION: Jill Errington to draft letter.

10 Traffic Lights for Dogs - Sub-Group

Consideration was given to the report of the Traffic Lights for Dogs Sub-Group following their meeting on 11 April 2018, a copy of which had been circulated. The report outlined their proposals for a scheme in County Durham similar to that developed by Hartlepool Borough Council. The LAF's agreement to this was sought.

AGREED that the proposed scheme be approved and a further meeting of the Sub-Group be arranged with Mike Ogden to discuss what practical assistance would be required of DCC to implement the project.

ACTION: Steve Scoffin/ David Maughan/Colin Hemingway/Brian Hodgson/Jim Welch and Mike Ogden.

11 DCC/LAF Liaison Meeting

Consideration was given to the action points from the DCC/LAF Liaison meeting held on 11 April 2018, a copy of which had been circulated. Steve Scoffin and Pat Holding briefed members on the outcomes from the meeting which discussed:-

-) Planning Training for LAF members
-) Public access to land post Brexit
-) Resource implications for the 2026 cut-off date for recording lost ways
-) Improving public access to Council owned land
-) Update on the County Durham Plan
-) Update on Heritage Lottery Funding Bids and other Projects

AGREED that the actions be noted and agreed.

ACTION:

1. Jill Errington to arrange a date for planning training on a date in July with representatives from other LAFs in the region invited to attend.
2. Jill Errington to arrange a date for a County Durham Plan Workshop for Durham LAF members on a date in July.
3. Mike Ogden to arrange a site visit with Pat Holding and Tom Bolton to assess the suitability of the potential sites identified for permissive access in Shildon, Seaham and Stanley.

12 Dedication of Land (Durham County Council)

See minute numbered 11.

13 North East of England Nature Partnership (NEENP)

Geoff Hughes provided an update on progress in relation to the NEENP. He informed members that the Partnership was starting to produce some positive work closely linked to the Capability Foundation. A Guide for Councillors had been

produced on environmental issues and good practice, and it was noted that this would be included in the planning training.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes to keep members informed of progress..

14 Bright Water Landscape Project

Geoff Hughes was pleased to report that the project had been successful in securing £3m from Heritage Lottery funding and a formal announcement would be made within the next two weeks. Members were asked to consider a proposed statement from the LAF in support of the project, a copy of which had been circulated.

AGREED that the information be noted and the LAF statement be confirmed.

15 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership (LOI)

Consideration was given to the report of Jim Welch which outlined progress with LOI projects to date. Members were informed of a joint LAF site visit to be held on 10 May 2018 to view some of the access projects.

AGREED that the information be noted and Jim Welch and Robin Trounson attend the site visit.

16 North Pennines AONB Partnership

Peter Singer provided feedback from his attendance at the meetings of the Access and Recreation Working Group and Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group held on 27 March 2018.

North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group

Highlights included:-

-) Raising the Standard Project
-) Extension of the Donate a Gate Scheme
-) North Pennines Walking Festival – 13 June to 15 July 2018
-) Development of North Pennines Long Distance Circular Walk
-) Geological Exhibition at Bowlees until 10 June 2018

Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group

Highlights included:-

-) Funding granted for a further year at same level
-) England's Great Walking Trails Project aimed at overseas visitors
-) Pennine Way People –route survey carried out by the 'Champions' over the last year.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Neil Gander or Peter Singer to attend next meeting.

17 Press Releases - Sheep Worrying and Hedgecutting

Consideration was given to the LAF press releases regarding sheep worrying and hedge-cutting. The sheep worrying press release had been issued in January 2018 and members were asked to agree and consider an appropriate time to publish the hedge-cutting press release.

AGREED that the hedge-cutting press release be issued in mid-August 2018, and in addition to circulating to media contacts the possibility of including the press release in County Durham News and on the Council's Facebook/twitter pages be explored.

ACTION: Jill Errington.

18 Teesdale Way

Members were informed of a workshop arranged by the River Tees Rediscovered Project to be held on 23 May 2018 at Darlington. The aim of the workshop was to collate all the projects being delivered, identify gaps in terms of access and develop a framework for celebrating the route going forward. Members were informed that Peter Singer had volunteered to attend.

AGREED that Peter Singer's attendance at the workshop be confirmed.

19 Woodland Revival Project

Consideration was given to the information leaflet for the Durham Woodland Revival Project. Mike Ogden advised that the Project Officer had only recently been appointed to the post.

AGREED that the Project Officer be invited to attend the next LAF meeting to discuss the project.

20 Member Training

In addition to the planning training identified for members the Chair asked members to forward any further suggestions for training to the LAF Secretary.

AGREED that all members consider any training requirements and e-mail any suggestions to Jill Errington.

21 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

AGREED that the open access restrictions received for Birk Hatt Moor and Wemmergill Moor, copies of which had been circulated, be noted.

22 Annual Report 2017/2018

The Chair informed members that the LAF's Annual Report for 2017/2018 would be agreed at the AGM on 16 July 2018. The approach used to last year's Annual Report was proposed, and therefore members would be asked to provide a single paragraph about their own topic areas summarising the nature of the work, highlights or developments over the past 12 months and any plans, hopes or expectations for the forthcoming year.

AGREED that members provide updates for the Annual Report 2017/2018.

ACTION: All to action. Jill Errington to send an e-mail aligning topic areas to individual members.

23 Work Programme/Targets and Outputs

AGREED that the Work Programme be updated to include the following topic areas/members:-

Huddle – Neil Gander/Steve Scoffin

Teesdale Way – David Maughan/Peter Singer

A66 North Trans-Pennine Route Project – David Maughan/Peter Singer

24 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the AGM be held on Monday 16 July 2018 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham.