



**LOCAL ACCESS  
FORUM** County Durham

**Annual Report 2018/19**

[www.durham.gov.uk/laf](http://www.durham.gov.uk/laf)



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## **Contents**

	Page
<b>1. LAF Purpose and Goals</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Map of area covered by County Durham Local Access Forum</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Chairman's Foreword</b>	<b>5-6</b>
<b>4. Members of the Forum</b>	<b>7-10</b>
<b>5. Dates of Meetings</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6. Business of the Forum</b>	<b>12-17</b>
<b>7. Contacts</b>	<b>18</b>



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## Purpose

County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory body created under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is independent of the Authority. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act states that the purpose of the LAF is:-

- To advise Durham County Council and others on the improvement of public access to the land in the County for the purpose of the open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area and other prescribed matters.
- In carrying out its function, the LAF will have due regard to the needs of land management and conservation of the natural beauty of the area.

## Goals

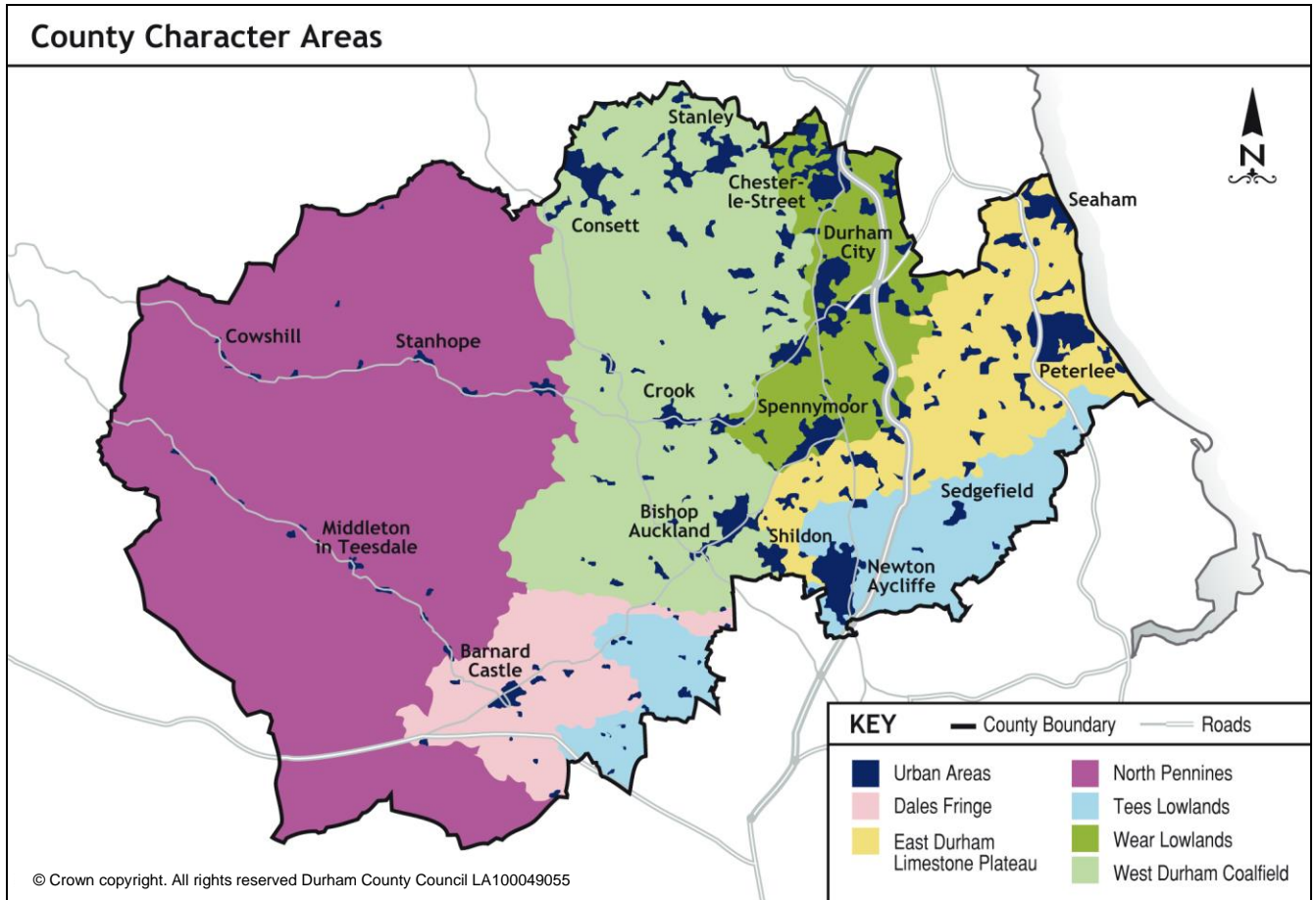
County Durham LAF will champion the improvement and management of access to meet all users' needs, be respectful of land management, promote responsible use and enable participation in healthy outdoor activity. County Durham LAF will work together to objectively advise Durham County Council and others and will make recommendations for the improvement of public access in County Durham.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

## County Durham

### Area covered by County Durham Local Access Forum





# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM **County Durham**

## **Chairman's Foreword**

Increasingly there is a need to balance the needs of the public in relation to the natural environment, with pressure on Government and local councils to build new homes, supply job opportunities but also consider health and well being issues. These sometimes seemingly opposed objectives can come into friction, but the role of the Local Access Forums is to try to help see a way through to assist with the wider objective of providing assistance with challenging areas with the aim of ultimately providing accessible natural spaces for all.

The role of the natural environment in promoting mental well-being is now universally acknowledged as being extremely important, and it is therefore key that the LAF has been involved with various health initiatives in the county and supports integrated planning to help those facing barriers to accessing the outdoors.

The LAF has also been supporting various Partnerships, including the North East Nature Partnership and the Bright Water Landscape Partnership. As well as shaping significant opportunities to get involved in a range of access improvement projects, there has been the chance to play a major role in shaping access proposals.

Work continues on looking at possible sites suitable for permissive use by the public, areas that have been proposed by the Council, and it is hoped some of these can be pursued with a view to providing wider public access in the future. And on identifying lost routes (the deadline of 2026 to pursue these draws ever closer) one member of the LAF continues to make considerable effort in preparing modification applications to the Council. It was gratifying to note that, along with representations by others, letters from the LAF to the Council helped convince those in the position to affect these matters that due to the large number of applications (50 plus or more) awaiting scrutiny that more resource in the Rights of Way Dept was needed to deal.

Balancing environmental, social and economic need is central to the work of the LAF in their statutory role of independent adviser to their local authority and other agencies in respect of recreational access to the countryside. Working with public, private and voluntary sector partners, LAFs seek to protect, integrate and enhance public access in local strategies, policies and plans while paying due regard to the needs of land management and environmental conservation.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

In this report you can read how members of County Durham's Local Access Forum, who represent both owner/occupier and user interests and can draw on a wide range of professional experience, contribute to Durham County Council's vision for a Better Durham: wealthier, healthier, safer, greener, and better for children and young people. By committing their time to attending meetings, pursuing research and responding to consultation documents, our members are making a real difference. Appreciation and thanks also go to council officers for their helpful and willing support.

We meet four times a year. All meetings are open to the public. If you feel you could play a part in improving access in County Durham, or would simply like to learn more about the work of the Forum, think about joining us at one of our meetings. For further details please contact our Secretary, Jill Errington, at [laf@durham.gov.uk](mailto:laf@durham.gov.uk)

**Pat Holding**  
Chair



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## Members of the Forum

## Category

### Pat Holding – (Chair)

**User**

Pat Holding is a recently retired solicitor. She specialised in common land, rights of way, and village green matters together with more general planning, highways and other environmental topics. She now appreciates being able to spend more time walking on County Durham's rights of way but also checking out countryside facilities elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

### Angela Johnson - (Vice-Chair)

**User**

Angela lives in central Durham and worked as a business analyst. She is an active horse rider and owner, competing in long distance riding for the past 20+ years, and was on the Committee of the Northumberland and Durham Group of the Endurance Horse and Pony Society for many years. Angela is a volunteer for the British Horse Society and has been Assistant Access and Bridleways Officer for East Durham since the late 1990s.

### Geoff Hughes

**Other**



Geoff has a broad knowledge of sport and recreation issues. He has recently retired as a leisure, planning and open space consultant. He is Chair of the Board Bright Water Landscape Partnership, Chair of Northumberland Sport and Chair of the North East Local Nature Partnership. Geoff is a keen cyclist, walker and fun runner.

### David Maughan MBE

**Landowner**

David is a farmer in south west Durham and represents landowner/occupier interests through his involvement in the National Farmers Union.

### Brian Hodgson

**Landowner**

Brian lives in central Durham and is an experienced landowner and farmer, as well as having been involved in several landowner groups.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## Neil Gander

**User**

Neil is a freelance journalist with a particular interest in mountain-biking, having written a guide to the activity within County Durham, as well as being a keen walker and a former voluntary ranger.

## Jim Welch

**Other**



Jim is involved with a number of organisations representing blind and partially-sighted people, and other disability groups, including being the founder and chairman of Blind Life in Durham.

## Tom Bolton

**Other**

Tom is a former local government officer with experience of rights of way orders as well as common land and village greens. As a scrutiny officer he supported projects looking at environmental issues including countryside and coastal access. He is a Parish Clerk and a co-opted member of the County Council's Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee.

## Geoffrey Rigden

**User**

Geoff is a retired teacher living in the Beamish area and has been involved in outdoor pursuits for many years both professionally and personally. He was a member of Sedgefield Countryside Group for many years, working to enable and maintain access in that area. He is a regular user of the extensive ROW system in the Derwentside area, and enjoys running, walking and cycling.

## Steve Scoffin

**Other**



Steve re-joined the LAF in 2016, having previously been a Member and Vice Chair from its inception to November 2012. He has worked in countryside management since 1978 starting as a Countryside Warden with Durham County Council at Hardwick Hall Country Park, after a short period working for Durham University's Archaeology Department as a Survey Assistant. He has worked throughout England, including as a Secretary of State Appointed Member of the North York Moors





# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM **County Durham**

National Park Authority, Chair of the Northumberland Coast and Lowlands LEADER Local Action Group, a Trustee of Durham Wildlife Trust and Company Secretary of the Countryside Management Association. He represented the National Park Authority on the North York Moors LAF, and was a Member of the Tees Valley LAF for nine years and Chair for six of these, and was Chair of Natural England's National LAF Conference in 2013. He currently teaches countryside management, business studies, ICT and management of farm livestock as a Lecturer at Askham Bryan College's Tees Valley Centre.

## **Peter Singer (now resigned)**

### **Other**

Peter is retired and has lived in Barnard Castle for the last twenty years. He is a keen walker, with an interest in local wildlife and conservation. Peter is a volunteer with Moor House-Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve and Trees For Teesdale and is a Pennine Way Champion. He is also secretary of Barnard Castle Walkers Are Welcome, which seeks to promote the town as a vibrant walking centre to attract walking tourists and monitors the maintenance of local footpaths. He has recently written a guided walk leaflet exploring the "yards" of Barnard Castle.

## **Robin Trounson – Vice-Chairman (now resigned)**

### **User**

Robin is a retired police officer. He is a keen walker and takes an active interest in facilitating recreational access to local attractions for the elderly and people with disabilities.

## **Carl Marshall**

### **Councillor**



Carl is currently the Durham County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration. This role includes strategic transport, the County Durham Plan and regeneration. Carl also represents the Council on the North East Combined



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Authority. He contributes to the role of ensuring that the work of the Forum is linked to the wider County Strategic Role.

**Ossie Johnson**

**Councillor**



Ossie is currently the Durham County Council Cabinet Member for Tourism, Culture, Leisure and Rural Issues and this involves being the council's Rural Champion. He also represents the Council on the north Pennines AONB Partnership. He contributes to ensuring that the work of the LAF is linked in to the wider County Strategic role.

## **Definition of Member Interests:-**

### **Users**

Users of local rights of way or open access land (eg walkers, horse riders, cyclists and carriage drivers)

### **Landowners**

Owners and occupiers of access land or land over which local rights of way subsist

### **Other**

Any other interests relevant to the appointing authority's area.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## Dates of Meetings 2018/19

The Forum met on the following dates:

- 23 April 2018
- 16 July 2018
- 22 October 2018
- 28 January 2019



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## Business of the Forum

### Annual Report

The publication of an annual report is a statutory requirement. LAF members are responsible for reporting on their own programmes of work. We also complete an annual review for Natural England to give them a national picture of activities, achievements, challenges and priorities.

### Presentations

The Forum received presentations on:-

Water Rangers  
Durham Woodland Revival Project  
Seascapes Project

### Durham County Council Liaison

Representatives of the LAF meet with Durham County Council's Head of Planning and Assets to discuss matters of common interest. At a meeting on 10 April 2019 opportunities to open up County Council land for public access in support of the public health agenda were discussed, together with resource implications of managing the registration of unrecorded historic rights of way, and training for LAF members in local planning procedures and the County Durham Plan.

### NE Regional LAF Chair and Vice-Chair Meetings

The Vice-Chair attended two regional LAF meetings during the year to exchange views and experiences across the region. As we do not now have meetings with Natural England, and do not have opportunities to meet and discuss with others at annual conferences, it is useful to have regional get-togethers to discuss topical issues and share information.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## **County Durham Plan**

The latest draft of the County Durham Plan had a consultation period for the public during 2018, and as part of this a specific roadshow was arranged for the LAF. Several members were able to attend this event held in July 2018. This helped formulate a response by the LAF to the consultation on the preferred options for the Plan. The Plan was then due for completion with the latest draft version due to be released during 2019.

## **Working with Public Health**

The LAF's links with public health reflect the role of the natural environment in promoting mental well-being and for combating obesity and related illnesses such as diabetes, strokes, cancer, heart disease, depression and high blood pressure. Having supported the launch of County Durham's Strategic Framework for Healthy Weight in 2015, the LAF has consolidated its role in the local health agenda by becoming a formal member of the County Durham Healthy Weight Alliance and supports 'a whole systems approach' in which obesity reduction is integrated with planning and holds that the key to achieving successful outcomes lies in identifying inactive and under-active groups, understanding the barriers they face and helping them to overcome impediments and embrace more active lifestyles.

## **Consultations**

During the year the LAF responded to the following consultations:-

County Durham Plan – Pre-submission draft  
County Durham Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan 2019-2029

## **North East England Nature Partnership (NEENP)**

County Durham LAF represents the North East LAFs on the Executive which met four times over the last year. Links have been established with the Capability Foundation in the expectation that the Partnership will secure additional funding to support the Secretariat and project development. During the year Paul Brannen, a member of the European Parliament, took over as Chair and it is expected that there will be a major initiative on urban forestry in 2019/20 which could afford significant opportunities to improve access. The LAF will keep a watching brief to monitor developments.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## **Bright Water Landscape Partnership**

Following the success of the submission of the funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund good progress has been made to recruit the team to implement a range of access improvement projects. County Durham LAF is represented on the Board and has played a major role in shaping access proposals which will begin to be implemented during 2019/20. The scheme offers the potential for local people and visitors to enjoy this forgotten area of County Durham in the south of the area.

## **Land of Oak and Iron**

Land of Oak and Iron (LOI) is a project based in the Derwent Valley to restore rare industrial relics, conserve waterways, meadows and woodland, and improve public access, awareness and understanding of the area's distinctive heritage. Access improvements, which started in 2016, are focused on repairing and upgrading to bridleway standard the poorest sections of some of the many old colliery railway lines and waggon-ways that criss-cross the valley in order to open up the area to many more people. The project extends over three local authority areas and the County Durham LAF has joined forces with the Northumberland and Tyne & Wear LAFs to monitor and support access developments. Over the past twelve months the LAF's representative has attended site visits in the area looking specifically at access issues and best practice to enable disabled people to access the Land of Oak and Iron. This included a visit to Winlaton Visitor Centre which opened in June 2018.

## **Heritage Coast Management Plan**

The final draft of the Heritage Coast Management Plan, was due to be published, incorporating some of the LAF's comments, towards the end of 2018. The LAF's views had been welcomed and it was understood members would receive a formal response to comments in due course. However research evidence is due to be included in the Plan, in 2019, before the final version is published. We await the final version and will assist with developments and planning for the future as appropriate.



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## **Coastal Access**

Representation on coastal access partnerships will be taken up by the LAF once these events occur; these currently appear to be on hold until the Management Plan is published.

Members were informed that Natural England were developing an initiative known as Living Coasts and one of the pilot projects was Seascapes. A study was being done to explore what people valued about their local coastal environment, as well as looking at barriers to engagement with the environment in deprived areas. The results are due to be reported to the LAF soon. The Seascapes Project is aimed at improving access to beaches, exploring shipwrecks and habitats beneath the wave as well as creating opportunities for local people and visitors to enjoy the coastline. The LAF is expected to be involved in due course, at the delivery stages of the project, particularly relating to work involving the coast path and access to beaches.

## **Lost Ways**

One member of the LAF has been doing extensive research into lost routes in County Durham, and has completed and submitted a number of modification application orders.

As the number of a modification applications submitted across the county (the vast majority by British Horse Society members) continued to grow (reaching at least half a century) it was agreed that the LAF send a letter to the Head of Transport and Contract Services. This was to give support for additional staff for the Rights of Way team to process the applications, as these are being stockpiled with no resource to deal with them. After a second letter was sent to the Head of Services it was confirmed that two new posts are to be created, each with a duration of two years, to deal with the modification requests.

## **Public Access to County Council Land**

Sites for potential public access in three areas (Shildon, Seaham and Stanley) had been originally identified by Council officials. Some members of the LAF sub group visited these sites. Later further sites were added to the list of feasible pieces of land (making a total of ten possible sites) and a scoring criteria was identified and used to assess the additional sites. This was seen as the start of a rolling programme of sites across the county which may be suitable for permissive access. Now the sub group need to confirm which sites, from the



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

current proposed list, they assess as being suitable for consideration for pursuing by the Council to confer formal public access.

## **Press Releases**

We have been able to make press releases at appropriate times of the year regarding two issues we are concerned about.

a) Sheep worrying- Against a background of rising cases of sheep worrying we asked all dog walkers to keep their dogs on leads when walking on footpaths in fields occupied by livestock .

b) Hedge cutting- We issued a press release ahead of the main hedge cutting season, starting in September, to encourage farmers to put up warning boards of cutting in progress and to clear roads where cuttings present a danger of causing punctures to cyclist's tyres.

## **A66 Trans Pennine Project- Non Motorised User Consultation**

The LAF has been represented on the Highways Agency non motorised users consultative group for the A66 50 mile upgrade which is currently being planned. A consultation on the proposed route alternatives to six sections to be duelled has just been completed with route choices to be announced in Spring 2020. Following this the details on access for non motorised users will be considered which is the Stage 3, during that period it is important for our LAF to be involved in discussions that involve our County Durham section.

## **Lead the Way**

Following on from our work the previous year concerning the Traffic Lights for Dogs project which had given encouraging results in the Hartlepool area we liaised with The Northern Farmer magazine which had been running a similar campaign under the title Lead the Way. We decided after consultation with the magazine's editor to utilise their Lead the Way poster by incorporating our own LAF logo. Our county hall team produced the laminated posters with a couple of LAF members distributing the posters to various outlets throughout the county for farmers and members of the public to pick up and display where they saw the need. The poster pick up rate was good with demand particularly high from posters placed in vet's surgeries.





# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM *County Durham*

## **North Pennines AONB Partnership**

The LAF is a member of the North Pennines AONB Partnership and plays an active part in its Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group (PNTNWG) and Access and Rights of Way Working Group (ARWWG).

## **Training**

Members received training on:

County Durham Plan  
Planning processes



# LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

## Contacts

### **Secretary**

Jill Errington  
Legal and Democratic Services  
Durham County Council  
Telephone: 03000 269703  
Email: [jill.errington@durham.gov.uk](mailto:jill.errington@durham.gov.uk)

### **Access and Rights of Way Team Officer**

Mike Ogden (Team Leader)  
Access and Rights of Way Team  
Durham County Council  
Telephone: 03000 265331  
Email: [mike.ogden@durham.gov.uk](mailto:mike.ogden@durham.gov.uk)

Audrey Christie

Senior Rights of Way Officer (Training, Enforcement & Caseload)  
Access and Rights of Way Team  
Durham County Council  
Telephone: 03000 265332  
Email: [audrey.christie@durham.gov.uk](mailto:audrey.christie@durham.gov.uk)

### **Travel Planning Team Officers**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent  
Sustainable Travel Officer (Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Cycling Strategy and Projects)  
Travel Planning Team  
Durham County Council  
Telephone: 03000 265311  
Email: [victoria.lloyd-gent@durham.gov.uk](mailto:victoria.lloyd-gent@durham.gov.uk)

Forum Website (Contains Minutes of all meetings and Annual Reports):

**[www.durham.gov.uk/laf](http://www.durham.gov.uk/laf)**

The Forum would like to thank the Officers for their continued support.