

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in **Committee Room 2 - County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 22 July 2019 at 6.00 p.m.**

Present:

Members

Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, Pat Holding, Angela Johnson, Councillor Andrea Patterson, David Maughan and Jim Welch.

Officers

Mike Ogden and Michael Turnbull.

Also Present

Niall Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer and Daryl Cox, Principal Parks and Countryside Ranger.

1 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

AGREED that Pat Holding be elected Chair and Angela Johnson be elected Vice-Chair of the LAF for the ensuing year.

2 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Niall Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer and Daryl Cox, Principal Parks and Countryside Ranger to the meeting.

The Chair also welcomed Councillor Andrea Patterson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Rural Issues. Councillor Patterson had replaced Councillor Johnson on the Council's Cabinet and assumed his Portfolio. Councillor Johnson had been elected as Vice-Chair of the County Council.

Apologies for absence were received from Tom Bolton, Councillor Carl Marshall, Geoff Rigden, Geoff Hughes and Steve Scoffin.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the agenda.

4 Natural England's Living Coast Community Voice Method Study Results

Niall Benson gave a presentation to Members on Natural England's Living Coast Community Voice Method Study Results.

The England Coastal Path was open from Amble to Filey and would be complete around the coast of England by 2020. The coastal trail would be one of the longest managed coastal trails in the world covering around 2700 miles.

A partnership covered the Tees to the Tyne which met twice a year. There was a desire to look beyond the establishment of the England Coastal Path and the creation of an initiative called the living coast to explore how other added benefits could be captured and used to best effect, particularly socioeconomic and environmental factors.

Members were appraised of the research project which showed that reduced levels of engagement within the natural environment occurred in deprived areas.

Two methods of consultation had been used as part of the research project. The first consultation process was called 'Community Voice'. A method which used film and workshops to record participants interests and the obstacles to using and accessing the environment. The research was carried out in five different localities from the Tyne to the Tees. The video footage was then edited and replayed to participants to test whether the findings and editing accurately reflected their thoughts.

A small video was shown to Members to provide a flavour of the types of comments shared. The main findings of the research highlighted the following:

- people were not aware of the ECP and how easy it was to access;
- concerns about litter and graffiti;
- lack of information on destination length and surface;
- access for those with impaired mobility was difficult; and
- guardianship.

The second consultative method comprised a parallel (physical) access audit against a set brief across five local authority areas. The findings of the parallel access audit in relation to County Durham were as follows:

- opportunities arising from the new railway station at Horden;
- waymarking from village centres preferably with England Coastal Path signage as opposed to ECP;
- signage to indicated where beaches could be accessed from; and
- the need for richer content on information panels.

An information audit was also conducted. This highlighted that generic information inspired people to visit the coastal path, however there was a gap of practical information. For example, upon arrival there was no information to say where visitors could go and no overview maps, which made it difficult for those unfamiliar with the area.

In conclusion, the access audit reports were due to be finalised. These would be circulated once complete. There was strong evidence to focus and support local delivery through individual local authority actions or partnership delivery projects.

Natural England were also going to use the work as a case study around the country.

Members thanked Niall for the interesting and informative presentation.

5 Countryside Service

Daryl Cox gave a presentation to Members about Durham County Council's Countryside Ranger Service which provided the key objectives of the service. The service managed areas from the Coast to the Pennines. Naturally, there was a large mix of areas, some of which had National and European designation and areas of geological interest.

Members were informed that the railway path network provided the service with the most issues. The railway paths were very popular routes for people to walk and cycle and made up a proportion of the Coast 2 Coast cycle route. The paths, by their very nature, were an extremely important asset. However, the paths also presented the service with large scale resource implications. For example, there were many old structures throughout the railway path network, some of the structures had significant issues and were essentially suffering from a lack of maintenance. The service was looking at a variety of different ways to manage these types of issues against a backdrop of dwindling resources.

The service had 120 volunteers involved in maintenance. Hardwick Park and Wharton were two managed parks which offered wide ranging activity programmes such as guided walks and birthday parties. The income generated from the parks was crucial to the service. Partnership working with other stakeholders was key and the service was constantly looking to engage with other partners. There was also a keen emphasis to link with public health wherever possible given the links to health and wellbeing and those actively involved in using railway paths, parks and all the countryside sites across the County.

There would always be challenges faced by the service, for example climate change added a further burden to the service over and above the issues already managed.

Members thanked Daryl for the presentation and praised the excellent work the service and all of its volunteers.

6 Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 April 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

7 Matters Arising

a) Northern Saints Trails

Members noted the letter of support sent to the Destination Project Manager for Visit County Durham.

b) County Durham Plan

Councillor Andrea Patterson informed the LAF that the County Durham Plan had been approved by the Cabinet and Full Council for formal submission to the Secretary of State for consideration at public examination.

c) Lost Ways

Neil Gander informed the LAF that over 100 'lost way' applications had now been submitted and good progress had been made. However, there was still much work to be undertaken. It was also pleasing to note that the County Council had recently appointed two officers who would be processing the applications.

AGREED that the information be noted.

8 National/Regional Issues

a) NE Regional LAF Chairs and Vice-Chairs

Angela Johnson provided feedback from the meeting held on 7 May 2019. The meeting heard that 'lost rights' were a key topic for discussion and there had been a suggestion by the Ramblers association that the cut-off date of 2026 should be abolished and that representation could be made to the appropriate Minister to change the law. Neil Garner explained that the abolition of the cut-off date would be welcomed, however, there was also a feeling that the deadline had focussed people's minds.

No date was set for the next meeting, however, Durham and Northumberland were keen to continue to hold joint meetings.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

9 Update from Rights of Way Team

Mike Ogden reported that the post vacated by the Senior Rights of Way Officer had been advertised. The application deadline had passed and interviews would be held during the coming week.

As previously mentioned by Neil Garner, two officers had been appointed to process 'lost way' applications. The appointments were for a two-year period initially but this would be reviewed as the work developed.

Mike Ogden also reported that there was now a new network of restricted by-ways for Wolsingham South Moor which would be included on the Definitive Map by 31 July 2019. Neil Garner commended the team for their work relating to Wolsingham South Moor.

AGREED that the information be noted.

10 Matters Raised by Members of the Public

Mike Ogden reported that two matters had been raised by the public.

The first matter followed on from a public question submitted to the full Council meeting which expressed concerns around resources of the Rights of Way Team and how definitive map applications would be processed and monitored.

The response provided by Councillor Carl Marshall at the meeting suggested that the LAF fulfilled the monitoring role which is why the matter had been raised by the member of the public for the attention of the LAF.

Mike Ogden reported that constructive dialogue had been held between the member of the public who submitted the public question to Council and the Rights of Way Team.

In relation to the second question, relating to access and walking in Sedgefield, Mike Ogden explained that the expectations of people had increased and people could report related matters much easier. The rights of way team would always try and work with members of the public but would always attempt to prioritise any issues relating to key routes.

Discussion would continue with both parties but it was important to note that both questions raised by the members of public centred around resources.

AGREED that LAF raise the issue regarding resources in their liaison with relevant officers of Durham County Council.

11 North East of England Nature Partnership

Members received the minutes of the Executive meeting held on 21 February 2019. Members also noted the written update provided by Geoff Hughes.

The Chair informed the LAF that Geoff Hughes was standing down from the Executive and advised Members to contact the Secretary if they wished to represent the LAF regionally. Any nomination would have to be presented to Northumberland and Tyne and Wear LAFs to agree, as they may also wish to take up the position.

AGREED that the minutes of the Executive and written update provided by Geoff Hughes be noted. Any expressions of interest to serve as the regional LAF representative on the Executive be forwarded to the Secretary.

12 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership

Members received a written update from Jim Welch regarding the Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership and feedback from a site visit to Winlaton Heritage Centre on 7 May 2019.

Jim Welch informed the LAF that the site visit was very interesting with good accessibility throughout. Advances in technology enabled visually impaired people to scan visitor boards using a mobile phone and the information was then relayed

back to the user. Jim also explained that it was amazing to see how many people had walked the route with the electronic foot counter which was a useful measure.

AGREED that Members note the information.

13 Bright Water Landscape Project

Members received a written update from Geoff Hughes on the Brightwater Landscape Project.

Mike Ogden informed the LAF that one of the access projects (C400) Fishburn to New Bishop's Fen was a Durham County Council access project using Brightwater funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the route would be formally recorded as a public bridleway.

AGREED that Members note the updated.

14 Prince Bishops Project

Mike Ogden informed the LAF that there had been no further progress since the item was raised at the previous meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

15 Health

Jim Welch provided an update to the LAF regarding a meeting of the County Durham Healthy Weight Alliance held on 18 July 2019 which provided information about the various groups and organisations concerned with health eating, keeping fit and reducing obesity in County Durham.

There were many challenges to getting people walking and motivated to better health and there was much discussion about work being carried out in schools around health eating and various works with allotment associations.

AGREED that Members note the information.

16 Common Land

Members noted the response from the LAF in respect of the response to informal consultation on an application to deregister Common Land at the Sands, Durham City

AGREED that Members note the response.

17 A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project

David Maughan provided an update on the A66 Trans-Pennine Project. There had been recent consultation on the six sections proposed to be duelled. There had been no consultation on how the proposed upgrade would impact on the public

rights of way network. This area of work was planned for stage three of the consultation which would take place in Spring 2020. Members considered that the LAF would need to observe the consultation carefully and it would be important to obtain a definitive map of the rights of way affected at the relevant point. There were sections where access could be improved, however, there were also sections where access could be lost. The overriding important factor was that all routes were useable and safe.

Mike Ogden added that there could be sections of the old road that could be utilised for cyclists and walkers. Mike referred to an email consultation relating to a walking/cycling/horse-riding survey of the route which provided two options for response. Option one was 'Do you consider existing facilities sufficient' with option two being 'is there a need for further provision'. The consultation email indicated that the survey had been sent to LAFs but it appeared that County Durham LAF had not received the email.

AGREED that Members note the update.

18 LAF Membership

Mike Ogden informed Members that advertising had recently taken place via a Visit County Durham newsletter. Following this a potential new member had expressed an interest in attending the meeting. However, the person had now indicated that he was no longer interested in participating.

AGREED that the information be noted.

19 Training

The Chair asked Members to consider any training needs they may have relevant to the work of the LAF.

AGREED that any expressions of interest be forwarded to the Secretary.

20 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

Members noted three notifications a copy of which had been circulated.

AGREED that the open access restrictions be noted.

21 Annual Report 2018/2019

Angela Johnson presented the Annual Report of the LAF for 2018/19 and thanked everyone for their contributions.

AGREED that the Annual Report be published and circulated.

22 Work Programme

AGREED the work programme for July 2019-July 2020.

23 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting of the LAF to be held on Monday 21 October 2019 at 6.00 p.m. in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham.