

COUNTY DURHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in **County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 21 October 2019 at 6.00 pm**

Present:

Pat Holding (Chair)

Members:

Tom Bolton, Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, Geoff Hughes, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Councillor Andrea Patterson, Geoff Rigden and Jim Welch

Officers: Mike Ogden, Nick Howell, Dagmar Richardson and Jill Errington

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Dagmar Richardson, Definitive Map Officer and Nick Howell, Senior Rights of Way Officer.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carl Marshall and Steve Scoffin, and Definitive Map Officer Josephine Upchurch.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 July 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 22 July 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising

a) Heritage Coast Management Plan

The final Plan had been published and Members were provided with the website link to the document.

Angela Johnson noted that the comments made by the LAF around linking routes had been incorporated. The Plan also identified the need for additional research regarding the impact of horses on wildlife.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) **County Durham Plan**

Councillor Patterson explained that the Plan had been approved by Cabinet and Council, and was now being examined by an Independent Inspector. There were daily updates on the Council's website.

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

c) **Matters Raised by Members of the Public**

Mike Ogden provided an update in relation to two matters raised by members of the public.

The first related to resources for the Rights of Way Team. He was pleased to report that two Definitive Map Officers were now in post to deal with Lost Ways applications. He suggested that resource implications for the routine work of the Team could be raised with Durham County Council when the Liaison meetings were resurrected with the Head of Corporate Property and Land, and other senior officers.

The second issue related to access and walking in Sedgefield. Geoff Hughes and the member of the public who had raised the matter had met with Officers on site to discuss footpath maintenance, how they were prioritised and how routes could be promoted.

Geoff Hughes appreciated that it was not feasible for the Team to maintain all routes but asked if routes that were cut over the summer months were reviewed. He also noted that some information leaflets about old routes were still in circulation. Mike Ogden confirmed that routes were reviewed but given the limited resources the Team focused on well-used Rights of Way.

Councillor Patterson asked if the routes were graded for accessibility and was advised that the Countryside Service provided information in respect of some routes owned by Durham County Council.

Jim Welch made the point that it was difficult to grade routes because of the differing needs of users.

AGREED that the information be noted.

d) **North East of England Nature Partnership – Appointment to the Executive**

Members were informed that there were no volunteers for nomination to the vacant position on the NEENP Executive and therefore Northumberland and Tyne and Wear LAFs had been invited to take up the appointment. Liz Bray of Northumberland JLAF had been appointed.

e) **Northern Saints Trails**

Mike Ogden reported that £10k had been secured for route improvements and wayfinder discs would be placed along the trail. The works would be

carried out over the winter. More information could be found on www.northensaints.com

AGREED that the information be noted.

5 Lost Ways Applications

Dagmar Richardson was in attendance to give a presentation on progress with Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs) in advance of the 2026 cut-off date.

Members were informed that 107 applications had been received to date with the majority submitted by the BHS and Neil Gander. Together with Josephine Upchurch she was tasked with adding around 10 DMMOs to the Definitive Map in the first year. A database had been developed to prioritise applications and over 40 1* were in progress (where evidence was good).

Following questions from members, Dagmar explained that applications were prioritised based on factors including historical documentary evidence, links with other routes and how the proposed routes sat within the wider landscape. The process was lengthy and included a 30 day consultation period.

Baxter Wood was the first application where the evidence had been checked and relevant parties had been consulted. The application was for a well-used section of a longer route that was already on the Definitive Map. The application would address this anomaly.

It was possible to vary routes, for example where a historic route would no longer be practical on the ground, with the agreement of all parties.

If during the application process evidence of another potential route was identified by officers, this would be logged and examined after the original application was determined.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that the update on progress be noted. Members thanked the Council for being proactive and putting dedicated resources in place to process the applications.

6 Durham Woodland Revival Project

Mike Ogden reported that £820k funding had been secured and the 4 year project was underway. The Project Manager had been appointed and was in post, and a Forestry Officer would commence work in November. Interviews for a Community Engagement Officer were to be held the following day. The Woodland Trust were involved and significant planting was ongoing across Council-owned land in the County. He was unable to say at this point if there would be public access to these sites.

Geoff Hughes and Geoff Rigden advised that they would be keen to be involved as the LAF's points of contact.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes and Geoff Rigden continue as the LAF points of contact as the Project progresses.

7 Update from Rights of Way Team

Nick Howell informed Members that he had been appointed to the post of Senior Rights of Way Officer following Audrey Christie's departure from the Team. He had worked in Durham County Council's Rights of Way Section for 17 years and his former post had been filled by new Rights of Way Officer Filomena Solan. The Team now had 11 staff, and he informed members of slight changes to areas covered by each Officer.

In terms of the work of the Team, the ploughing and cropping campaign this year had targeted 161 paths, and he was pleased to report that there had been no need to issue any Enforcement Notices.

Members were informed of an Enforcement Notice served on a farmer in the Dipton area for the obstruction of a Public Right of Way.

AGREED that the information be noted.

8 Common Land

AGREED that the response sent to the Planning Inspectorate regarding the application by DCC to deregister Common Land at The Sands, Durham, be noted.

9 Public Access to Council-owned Land

Pat Holding reported that the Sub-Group had met prior to the LAF meeting to discuss the potential sites identified by DCC as suitable for permissive access. The Sub-Group had visited and rated each site in accordance with agreed criteria. The Sub-Group proposed that with the exception of Harperley Pea Woods, all of the sites should be granted permissive access.

AGREED that the Sub-Group meet with the Head of Corporate Property and Land to discuss the next steps for the sites identified, and to identify new sites. The meeting was also an opportunity to introduce the LAF to the new Officer.

ACTION: Pat Holding/Angela Johnson/Geoff Hughes/Tom Bolton to meet with the Head of Corporate Property and Land.

10 A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project

David Maughan reported that the Highways Agency had hosted roadshows to present options for the sections of the A66 which were to be dualled. The preferred options would be announced in the Spring of 2020 following consultation. Consultants had been commissioned by the Highways Agency to undertake a consultation exercise to seek views on the impact of the proposed works on Rights

of Way. Limited information had been provided by the Consultants and consultees were therefore required to identify existing Rights of Way before making comment, which was disappointing. Mike Ogden advised that he had highlighted the Rights of Way which would be affected and also those that had been affected as a result of dualling in the past. Once the preferred options had been decided consultees would be able to comment fully on the impact on Rights of Way.

Neil Gander made the point that byways and minor roads would also be affected. It was currently very difficult for cyclists and horseriders to cross the A66.

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

ACTION: David Maughan to keep members informed of progress.

11 Bright Water Landscape Partnership Project

Geoff Hughes provided an update on progress and referred members to the Commons debate that took place on 5 September 2019 when Phil Wilson MP discussed the project, details of which were included in the papers. Members were also provided with the Board report for September 2019. Geoff Hughes advised that £75k match funding had been secured from Northumbrian Water and funding from the Highways Agency was expected. Members were informed of the works to date which were included in the Board report.

Following a question from Angela Johnson, Geoff Hughes advised that bridge refurbishment as part of the Fishburn to New Bishop's Fen would be the only new Right of Way created.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes to keep members informed of progress.

12 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership

Jim Welch reported that he had not received a further update since the last meeting. Mike Ogden advised that the Team had been working with LOI volunteers at Muggleswick and access improvements had been made at Derwentcote Steel Furnace sites.

AGREED that the information be noted and an update be awaited.

ACTION: Jim Welch to provide an update at the next meeting.

13 North Pennines AONB Partnership

The minutes of the meetings of North Pennines AONB Working Groups held on 7 June 2019 were received.

Neil Gander provided an update from the meetings held on 4 September 2019. The circular walk referred to in the minutes of the 7 June meeting was going ahead and the Length of Britain Trail was launched in the Summer by Cycling UK.

Neil Gander had raised the issue of landowners putting new surfaces along Rights of Way for vehicular use, and the impact on old pack horse trails because of the materials used. Whilst he was aware that this had occurred on Hexhamshire Common in Northumberland, he felt that Durham County Council should be alerted to the potential for estate owners to do the same in County Durham. Members were informed that a proposed change in surface should be the subject of a planning application and consultation with the Highways Authority.

AGREED that the information be noted.

14 Health

Jim Welch provided feedback following his attendance at the Healthy Weight Alliance Group meeting held on 9 September 2019. The Agenda and minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated to members by e-mail.

Members were also provided with feedback following Jim Welch's attendance at the Active Durham event held on 19 September 2019, details of which had been circulated to members by e-mail.

AGREED that the information be noted.

15 Member Training

The Chair asked members to consider any training needs relevant to the work of the LAF. It was suggested that members receive a presentation on the Woodland Revival Project at a future meeting.

Jim Welch suggested that training be provided on the legislation regarding Common land and Village Greens. Tom Bolton had provided this previously but members felt that a further session would be useful.

AGREED that a training session on Common Land and Village Greens be arranged, to take place immediately prior to the next LAF meeting.

ACTION: Tom Bolton.

16 Membership Update

Mike Ogden reported that the National Trust had expressed an interest in being a member of the LAF.

David Maughan suggested that Land Agents be approached who had last been represented on the LAF a number of years ago.

Geoff Hughes asked if there had been any developments with Natural England's involvement with LAFs. Mike Ogden advised that due to a lack of resources Natural England did not have the capacity to support LAFs on a regional basis, and as a consequence their involvement with Forums nationally had reduced considerably.

AGREED that the information be noted and ways of increasing LAF membership continue to be explored.

17 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

a) Open Access Restrictions - Notifications

AGREED that the open access restrictions received in respect of Hamsterley and Wolsingham Park Moor be noted;

b) Consultation – Existing Direction at Waskerley Park and Wolsingham North Moor

The LAF had been invited to comment on an existing direction to assist Natural England in deciding whether the exclusion was still necessary and appropriate for its original purpose for formal driven shoots. A volunteer was sought to examine and respond to the consultation on behalf of the LAF.

AGREED that Neil Gander draft a response to the consultation by the deadline of 31 October 2019.

18 Work Programme

AGREED that the Heritage Coast Management Plan be removed from the Work Programme.

19 Dates of Future Meetings

The meeting dates for 2019 were **AGREED** as follows:-

Monday 27 January 2020
Monday 27 April 2020
Monday 20 July 2020
Monday 19 October 2020

All meetings to commence at 6.00pm and be held in County Hall, Durham, however consideration be given to alternative venues as and when appropriate to the work of the LAF.

20 Any other business

Geoff Hughes reported that Bright Water were hosting a formal dinner at Ramside Hall on 2 November 2019 to which a LAF member was invited to attend.

AGREED that anyone interested in attending the function to contact the LAF Secretary.