

DURHAM COUNTY LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Monday 27 January 2020 at 6.00 pm**

Present:

Pat Holding (Chair)

Members:

Tom Bolton, Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, Angela Johnson, David Maughan and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Nick Howell and Jill Errington

Observer:

Julie Kirkley

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

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

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 October 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising

a) **County Durham Plan**

Members considered a written update on progress with the County Durham Plan from Councillor Carl Marshall, a copy of which had been circulated.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

b) **Northern Saints Trails**

Mike Ogden reported that the project was due to be launched at the end of March 2020 and the Team were in the process of installing waymarks along the routes. Visit County Durham were arranging events to explore opportunities for local businesses close to the trails. In the longer term the project hoped that businesses could monitor their local routes for maintenance or repair issues.

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

c) **Lost Ways Applications**

Nick Howell reported that since the last meeting the number of applications received had risen from 107 to 141, and more were expected. The first application in respect of Baxter Wood was to be reported to the Council's Highways Committee on 18 February 2020. Members of the Highways Committee would receive training on the DMMO process and Lost Way applications in advance of that meeting.

Neil Gander advised that there was still much of Teesdale to research but after that the rate at which applications were submitted should slow down.

The next step for the Definitive Map Officers was to examine 11 applications in respect of South Bedburn where there were a number of landowners.

Neil Gander asked if the Council had sufficient resources to process applications and was informed that at present this was not an issue. The Definitive Map Officers were employed for 2 years but in view of the number of applications being received, there was a strong case for their contracts to be extended if necessary.

David Maughan referred to the second iteration of the Agricultural Bill which was published on 15 January 2020 for debate in the House of Commons. The Bill included financial assistance available for landowners in respect of improving access to the public path network. Mike Ogden advised that he had met with Allie Hesketh an NFU Adviser who had received a number of queries about this on behalf of landowners.

AGREED that the update on progress be noted.

d) **Durham Woodland Revival Project**

Mike Ogden reported that staff were now in post and the Community Engagement Officer had agreed to attend a future LAF meeting to give a presentation on the project, with particular emphasis on access improvements.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

e) **Public Access to Council-owned Land**

Mike Ogden reported that the Sub-Group had agreed at the last meeting to meet with the new Head of Corporate Property and Land Susan Robinson. Although he had briefly discussed the LAF's position in this regard with her, he hoped to meet to discuss this with her formally and brief her on the role of the LAF. A meeting of the Sub-Group would then be arranged with the Head of Corporate Property and Land to discuss the sites identified by the LAF and the next steps.

AGREED that the information given be noted, and a meeting of the Sub-Group be arranged following Mike Ogden's meeting with the Head of Corporate Property and Land.

5 Update from Rights of Way Team

Nick Howell reported the forthcoming retirement of Rights of Way Officer Leigh Coulson at the end of February 2020. He was a highly valued member of the Team who for the last 9 years had been the Team's IT expert. The post would be filled and a new job description and specification had been written to reflect his skills.

Members conveyed their best wishes to Leigh for his retirement.

Nick Howell continued that the landowner in the Dipton area who had been served an Enforcement Notice for the obstruction of a Public Right of Way had complied with the Notice, and no further action was needed.

Members were also informed of a Notice served under Section 165 of the Highways Act 1980 requiring a landowner to erect stock-proof fencing in St Helen Auckland. The Notice had not been complied with and the Team were awaiting further instructions from the Council's Legal Section and the Police.

Brian Hodgson referred to the Ploughing and Cropping Campaign for 2020 and stated that in view of the wet weather experienced in the Autumn some paths may be difficult to reinstate. Nick Howell replied that this would be borne in mind when the campaign commenced in the Spring.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

6 Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP)

Mike Ogden reported that the Council's last ROWIP expired at the end of 2018. He had liaised with colleagues with experience of developing Plans to assist in preparing a new ROWIP, and the Sub-Group would be involved when a first draft had been produced.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Tom Bolton/Jim Welch.

7 Common Land

The Committee noted the LAF's further comments and the applicant's response in respect of the application to de-register common land at The Sands, Durham.

Members were disappointed that Durham County Council, the Commons Registration Authority which had powers to protect common land, had set a poor example by fencing off part of registered Common Land to facilitate the works to provide a new Council HQ. The depth of public feeling was demonstrated by the number of objections submitted.

AGREED that the information given be noted and the outcome of the application be awaited.

8 Durham City Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation

Members had been invited to comment on the final draft of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan before it progressed to the examination stage.

AGREED that no further comments be provided.

9 Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership

The Committee considered the update provided in respect of the Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership, a copy of which had been circulated.

Mike Ogden reported that Peter Downes, Access and Woodland Officer had been invited to give a presentation at the April LAF meeting on the access works carried out as the project was coming to an end. It was suggested that the LAF may wish to visit one of the projects in the future.

Neil Gander referred to the re-surfacing work carried out at Lintz Lane and noted that cyclists were disappointed with the new smooth surface. Mike Ogden advised that the surface was not sealed so would scour over time.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: A site visit be considered to one of the projects following the presentation.

10 Bright Water Landscape Project

Consideration was given to the Board update for December 2019, a copy of which had been circulated.

Mike Ogden highlighted that contractors had been appointed to the new bridge and bridleway project at Bishop's Fen with the works expected to commence in March 2020.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes to keep members informed of progress.

11 North Pennines AONB Partnership

Mike Ogden provided feedback from the meeting held on 9 December 2019 of the joint Tourism and Access and Recreation Working Group. Jim Welch referred to proposals to enhance accessibility in Teesdale and Swaledale and considered that a key issue would be encouraging people to use the routes and transport. Key to

its success would be to invite a small group of people in the first instance, and their confidence would then encourage others to get involved.

AGREED that the minutes of the meetings of the Access and Recreation Working Group held on 4 September 2019, the Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group held on 4 September 2019, and the joint Tourism and Access and Recreation Working Group held on 9 December 2019 be received.

12 Health

Jim Welch provided feedback from the Healthy Weight Alliance Group meeting held on 6 January 2020, which included a workshop about encouraging people to go out walking. The provision of transport to walking routes was also discussed.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: Jim Welch to continue to provide feedback.

13 Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

Members were informed that workshops had been held to seek views on cycling and walking infrastructure plans for the towns of Chester-le-Street, Newton Aycliffe and Durham, to which the LAF had been invited. Geoff Rigden had attended one of the workshops on 15 January 2020 which discussed proposed plans for Chester-le-Street.

Neil Gander advised that he had spoken with the Sustainable Travel Officer, Victoria Lloyd-Gent and he had found that the plans were a collection of desire lines to enable application for funding from the Department of Transport. He appreciated the work carried out but there needed to be greater local and national government commitment to provide safe cycling infrastructure.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden and Neil Gander to continue to be involved.

14 Derwent Walk

Neil Gander reported that the new MP for North West Durham had announced that he wished to return the Derwent Walk to a working railway line, with a multi-user route alongside. He suggested that the Council may wish to consider exploring means of protecting former railway routes. Members were informed that the Government had allocated funding for feasibility studies into the reinstatement of former railways. Members felt that this would be a huge undertaking with many practical issues which would be difficult to overcome.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

15 Membership Update

Mike Ogden reported that the National Trust were still interested in being represented on the LAF and had been asked to complete an application form. He had asked Allie Hesketh, NFU Adviser if she was aware of anyone within their membership who may be interested.

David Maughan suggested contacting the CLA, the membership organisation for landowners. Land Agents may be interested in view of the potential implications of Lost Way applications.

AGREED that the information given be noted and progress with potential new members be awaited.

16 Member Training

The Chair asked members to consider any training needs relevant to the work of the LAF.

Tom Bolton had provided training in respect of Common Land immediately prior to the meeting and members asked that a further training session on Village Greens be provided at a future meeting.

AGREED that members inform the Secretary of any training needs and Tom be thanked for his presentation on Common Land.

ACTION: Tom Bolton provide training on village greens at a future meeting.

17 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

AGREED that

- a) the open access notifications received in the quarter be received;
- b) the LAF's response and Natural England's outcome report in respect of Waskerley Park and Wolsingham Park Moor be noted;
- c) no comments be made in respect of the consultation on an existing direction at Lambshield Farm.

18 Work Programme

AGREED that coastal access be removed from the Work Programme.

19 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

Monday 27 April 2020 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, County Hall.