

## **County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF)**

At a meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF)** held **remotely via Microsoft Teams** on **Tuesday 24 November 2020 at 2.00 pm**

### **Present:**

**Pat Holding – Chair**

### **LAF Members:**

Neil Gander, Geoff Hughes, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Councillor Andrea Patterson, Jim Welch and Eric Wilton

### **Officers:**

Mike Ogden, Nick Howell and Jill Errington

### **Also Present:**

Kath Marshall-Ivens – Durham Woodland Revival

Peter Downes – Durham Wildlife Trust

Jo Bird – Observer

Prior to the commencement of business members agreed that due to the current situation regarding COVID-19 which meant that it had not been practical to hold meetings during the year, the current Chair and Vice-Chair remain in post until the AGM in July 2021.

### **Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Tom Bolton, Julie Kirkley and Councillor Carl Marshall.

The Chair welcomed new member Eric Wilton to the meeting, and also Jo Bird from the Open Spaces Society who was in attendance as an observer.

### **Durham Woodland Revival**

The LAF received a presentation from Kath Marshall-Ivens, Community Engagement Officer for Durham Woodland Revival who provided an overview of the Project.

Following questions from members, the Officer advised that she would provide a more detailed map showing ancient woodland sites and the three woodland sites to be planted up at Carrville, Frankland and Thornley. She would also provide a link to the Durham Woodland Revival website.

Geoff Hughes referred to the DCC sites which the LAF had identified for the Council to consider as potential public access sites, some of which were woodland, and considered it would be useful to look at these sites alongside the Durham

Woodland Revival Project. It was suggested that Geoff Hughes and Kath Marshall-Ivens discuss the sites identified and how the LAF could support the Project.

**AGREED** that that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Geoff Hughes to liaise with Kath Marshall-Ivens on the potential public access sites and how the LAF could support the Project.

### **Land of Oak and Iron Landscape Partnership**

Peter Downes of Durham Wildlife Trust was in attendance and discussed with members access work he was currently involved with at Muggleswick, Burnopfield and Castleside.

Members thanked Peter for the information and asked if the LAF could receive information regarding the legacy of the Land of Oak and Iron Partnership which ended two months ago. Peter confirmed that he would and would send details of the Chair of the Trust who was producing a report on the Project's legacy.

**AGREED** that the information from Peter Downes be awaited.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 January 2020**

The Minutes of the meeting were agreed as a correct record.

### **Matters Arising**

#### County Durham Plan

Members were informed that the County Durham Plan had been adopted by the Council on 21 October 2020, and a link to the Plan was included with the Agenda.

#### Common Land – The Sands, Durham City

Members were informed that although details had not yet been received, a Public Inquiry was to be held remotely on 26 and 27 January 2021. The Planning Inspectorate had been informed that the LAF would wish to attend the Inquiry to observe, and had reserved two places.

Mike Ogden advised that Inquiries were generally held in public and Geoff Hughes asked if he could inform members whenever there were any that may be of relevance to the work of the LAF.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and further details of the Public Inquiry regarding Common Land at The Sands be awaited.

## Public Access to Council-owned Land

Members were informed that the LAF was due to meet with the Head of Corporate Property and Land but progress had been stalled due to the situation with Coronavirus. However members felt that a remote meeting with the Officer could be arranged to discuss the next steps. It would also be an opportunity for the Officer to find out more about the LAF's role.

**AGREED** that arrangements be made for a Teams meeting with the Head of Corporate Property and Land to discuss the potential sites identified for open access.

**ACTION:** Jill Errington and Mike Ogden to arrange a remote meeting between the Head of Corporate Property and Land, and the lead LAF members on Public Access to Council-owned land.

## National/Regional Issues

### National Trails Annual Report 2018-2019

**AGREED** that the National Trails Annual Report for 2018-2019, a copy of which had been circulated earlier in the year, be noted.

### A66 North Trans-Pennine Project

Consideration was given to the written update on progress with the Project together with the Highways Agency's Winter update newsletter.

Mike Ogden had attended the Stakeholder meeting on 13 November 2020, and the minutes would be circulated to members on receipt.

David Maughan had said that he felt that the Highways Agency had taken into consideration the views of stakeholders.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** David Maughan to continue to provide updates on progress.

### Stockton and Darlington Railway – Walking and Cycling Opportunities Workshop

To mark the bi-centenary of the Darlington to Stockton Railway opening in 1825 a project was being undertaken to create a footpath and cycleway along its length. David Maughan and Neil Gander attended the stakeholder workshop when the audit and delivery plans were introduced. It was planned that the footpath and cycleway would be developed between Stockton and Witton Park; this would place a sizeable section within County Durham so it was welcome that the LAF would be involved.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** David Maughan and Neil Gander provide updates and the topic be included as a substantive item on future Agendas.

#### Campaign for Temporary Footpath Diversions – Walker Safety Around Livestock

David Maughan had asked for this matter to be raised which had become an issue particularly during lockdown as more people visited the countryside. Members discussed the matter at length and felt that education and signage was important. It was highlighted that this was a national issue.

Councillor Patterson advised that the Council had done some work around the Countryside Code and with farmers regarding signage. Marshalls had been deployed at tourist hotspots over the summer to ensure the safety of visitors. Information had been put on the Council's website but a much wider campaign would be launched in the New Year.

It was suggested that an article be included in County Durham News. David Maughan was awaiting further information from the NFU on a national campaign.

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

**ACTION:** David Maughan to lead.

#### Rights of Way Team

Nick Howell provided an update on the work of the Rights of Way Team, further to the August update circulated with the LAF papers.

A Rights of Way Officer had left the Team and it was hoped that the vacant position would be filled in Spring 2021.

The 2 DMMO officers had been unable to visit the Record Office over the Summer which had delayed progress with research on the Lost Way applications.

He was pleased to report that there were no enforcement notices served during the Ploughing and Cropping Campaign.

The Planning Inspectorate had upheld the Bridleway Order for Red House Waskerley. Neil Gander welcomed the news and said that he would like to see the Council use more of these Orders, but was disappointed that Red House had been removed from the List of Streets without consulting users. Nick Howell explained that Creation Orders were considered on a case by case basis, with a number of factors taken into consideration. In the case of Red House a number of people had contacted the Council. A delegated report had been considered to be the most appropriate way to remove Red House from the List of Streets as it was correcting an error in records of the former District Council.

The Chair suggested that it might be useful to have a training session on the List of Streets, and Creation Orders.

Brian Hodgson referred to the problems a farm had experienced due to an increased number of people during COVID-19 as the public footpath ran through the farmyard. Nick Howell explained that in normal circumstances a landowner could apply for a footpath diversion, but unfortunately the Government did not give Councils any authority to divert or close public footpaths during the lockdown. The Council provided signs to try to assist landowners, but unfortunately this was all that was available.

Nick Howell said he would discuss the matter with Brian Hodgson.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### **Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

Mike Ogden explained that work on the ROWIP had not progressed because of COVID-19. It had been decided that work on developing the plan should wait until circumstances returned to normal. The LAF would be a key consultee.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### **Lost Ways - Definitive Map Modification Orders**

Neil Gander reported that the closure of the Records Office had been disappointing, and that access to the National Archives had also been lost for now. However progress was still being made, and there had been 231 applications to date.

Geoff Hughes noted that the national Ramblers Association were encouraging people to come forward with suggested routes. This was a huge undertaking which the BHS had carried out extensive work on and had provided in-depth training, so it was not yet clear whether the Ramblers Association work would result in the same level of applications, given what was involved.

Councillor Patterson extended her thanks to the Rights of Way Team. The work over the year had been intense, and she had been contacted by the BHS to present the team with an award for their work, particularly on Lost Ways. Although the presentation could not take place due to Covid restrictions, the certificate and citation had been received.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Updates continue to be provided.

### **Northern Saints Trails**

Mike Ogden reported that the Northern Saints Trails had been 'soft launched' in the summer with a full launch planned for 2021. The routes had been waymarked on

the ground, and various publications had been produced in advance of the main launch. The website was now up and running at [www.northernsaints.com](http://www.northernsaints.com)

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### **Bright Water Landscape Project**

In the absence of Tom Bolton, Pat Holding advised that she understood that he was interested in representing the LAF on the Bright Water Board, and had been seeking further information, but this was yet to be confirmed.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** LAF representation on the Board be pursued.

### **Health**

Jim Welch provided feedback from his attendance at meetings of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group on 6 July 2020 and 5 October 2020. Members were advised that meetings were being held remotely at present and the current situation with Coronavirus had slowed progress with projects, including an allotments project with schoolchildren. However he was pleased to report that he was still receiving updates.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Jim Welch to continue to provide updates.

### **Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans**

Neil Gander provided feedback from his attendance at a Stakeholder event on 17 September 2020 which considered the Plan for Chester-le-Street. Neil explained that the event looked at routes through Chester-le-Street and that the plan was in the early stages. He was concerned that the routes may reduce or change when the Highways Authority was consulted. He had raised the point Angela Johnson had highlighted regarding the impact of routes on horse-riders (as set out in the August update attached with the papers for the meeting).

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

### **Durham County Council Draft Road Safety Strategy**

**AGREED** that the LAF response to the draft Road Safety Strategy be noted and an update on progress be sought from the Council.

**ACTION:** LAF Secretary to seek an update on progress.

Angela Johnson noted that the Government had issued consultation on proposed changes to the Highway Code for horse-riders and cyclists. Durham County Council had not responded to the consultation.

## **North Pennines AONB Partnership**

**AGREED** that the draft Minutes of the Access and Recreation Working Group held on 29 September 2020 be received.

### **Press Releases**

**AGREED** that the annual press releases issued in 2020 in respect of hedgecutting and sheep-worrying be noted.

Members discussed whether the sheep-worrying press release which was due to be issued in January 2021 should be widened to include advice to dog-owners when walking near livestock. Members considered that this was a separate issue and should be dealt with as part of a national campaign.

**AGREED** that the sheep-worrying press release be issued in January 2021.

**ACTION:** David Maughan.

### **Notification of Open Access Restrictions**

**AGREED** that

- a) the open access restrictions received since January 2020 be noted;
- b) the outcome of the review of the existing direction for Lambshield Farm be noted;
- c) the response and outcome of consultation regarding a review of the existing direction for Muggleswick Woods and Derwent Gorge NNR be received.

### **Membership Update**

**AGREED** that the appointment of new members Eric Wilton and Julie Kirkley, be noted.

### **Member Training**

**AGREED** that training on village green legislation, and the 'List of Streets' be delivered when meetings resume in person.

### **LAF Annual Report 2019-2020**

The LAF Annual Report for 2019-2020 was **AGREED**.

**ACTION:** LAF Secretary to circulate.

### **Work Programme**

**AGREED** that

- a) the Work Programme be updated to include the following topics:

Stockton and Darlington Railway – Walking and Cycling Opportunities

Campaign for Temporary Footpath Diversions – Walker Safety Around Livestock

- b) the work area for Durham Woodland Revival be amended by Geoff Hughes following discussions with Kath Marshall-Ivens.

**Date, Time and Venue of Meetings for 2021**

**AGREED** that proposed dates for LAF meetings in 2021 be circulated. The meetings to continue to be held remotely for the time-being.