

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 7 April 2014 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes Chairman

Members of the Forum:

Tom Bolton, Roger Cornwell (until item 16) , Councillor Neil Foster, Brian Hodgson, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Rob Trounson and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Victoria Lloyd and Jill Errington

Also Present:

Esther Mireku – Public Health Portfolio Lead, DCC (until item 4)

The Chairman informed members of the sad news that Chris Wiltsher had passed away suddenly and the meeting was paused for a moment of quiet reflection as a mark of respect.

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Eddie Tomlinson, Neil Gander, Ray Partridge, Geoff Rigden and Audrey Christie.

The Chairman welcomed new member Rob Trounson to the meeting.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Health

Esther Mireku, Public Health Portfolio Lead gave a presentation to members on the draft Healthy Weight Framework for 2014-2020 with a focus on the built/natural environment and how the LAF could contribute to achieving the aims of the Strategy.

The Framework aimed to promote evidence-based multi-agency working to achieve a sustained upward trend in healthy weight for children and adults in County Durham, providing an enabling environment for exercise.

Four achievable objectives had been produced to deliver the aims of the Framework and Esther Mireku discussed with members how the LAF could

contribute to promoting the use of the built/natural environment for physical activity and make it more accessible.

In discussing the Framework members felt that a key issue was that people were not encouraged by health care professionals to use their own local areas for exercise. Tom Bolton referred to a scrutiny review carried out in 2004 which looked at access to the Durham coast. One of the issues arising from that review was that the coast line wasn't being used as a resource to improve the health of local people.

Members considered that it would be useful to have local footpaths promoted in GP surgeries and local schools. Councillor Foster added that each school had its own Travel Plan with schemes such as WOW and Park and Stride being promoted.

The Chairman thanked Esther Mireku for her presentation and it was **AGREED** that the information given be noted.

4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 January 2014 - copy attached

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

5 Matters Arising

a) MENE Champion

Natural England were to provide training to MENE Champions but this had not yet taken place.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

b) DEFRA Improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way

Mike Ogden provided an update in relation to improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way. Members were advised of the Bill's progress through Parliament and that it should become statute by March 2015.

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

ACTION: Mike Ogden/Audrey Christie.

c) County Durham Plan

Brian Hodgson informed members that Phase 1 of works on the western relief road had now been completed and Phase 2 was underway. He circulated photographs showing the damage done to agricultural land and members were informed that the footpaths and bridleways in the Baxter Wood area had also been affected by the works.

Mike Ogden advised that he had not received any reports of damage to Public Rights of Way but asked members to inform him of paths that had been affected and he would arrange for inspections to be carried out.

Councillor Foster stated that the emerging County Durham Plan had been approved by Council on 2 April 2014 and the first inspection was due to be carried out in July 2014 looking at over-arching issues with a second tranche in September or October 2014 to consider individual sites.

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

ACTION: Chairman to keep members informed of progress.

d) DEFRA Research - LNPs

The Chairman advised that as reported at the last meeting he had been invited to take part in an evaluation of LNPs but had heard nothing further from the consultant who had been commissioned to undertake the research.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

6 National/Regional Issues

Natural England

Rob Aubrook, Area Manager for the North East

Consideration was given to the letter received from Rob Aubrook, Area Manager for the North East who commenced his appointment on 1 April 2014.

AGREED that the information given be noted and he be invited to a future meeting of the LAF to discuss Natural England priorities.

LAF National Annual Report 2012-2013

Consideration was given to the LAF National Annual Report for 2012-2013 which outlined the work achieved by Local Access Forums during the year ending 31 March 2013.

AGREED that the Annual Report for 2012-2013 be received.

LAF Newsletter Issue 3

Consideration was given to the third issue of the LAF Newsletter which included an article by Tom Bolton regarding 'Sustaining the Commons'.

AGREED that the Newsletter be received and Tom Bolton be thanked for his work on the article.

Annual Review Form 2013-2014

Consideration was given to the Annual Review Form received from Natural England for completion in respect of the year 2013-2014.

AGREED that the information given be noted and the form be completed and submitted to Natural England.

ACTION: Chairman/Roger Cornwell/Mike Ogden.

7 Paths for Communities

P4C Newsletter

Consideration was given to P4C News for Winter 2014 which included an article from Mike Ogden who had given his perspective of the programme in his capacity as a member of the Grants Panel.

AGREED that the Newsletter be received.

8 LAF National Conference

Consideration was given to the report of Roger Cornwell regarding the National LAF Conference held in Durham on 7 March 2014.

Roger Cornwell provided feedback in relation to the workshops he had attended, 'Access for All' and 'LAF Effectiveness' and made reference to a session on Rail Crossings and Public Rights of Way.

Given the increased usage that the opening of the Coast Path might bring about, members discussed how the LAF could be involved to ensure that the rail crossings were safe. Mike Ogden advised that Road Rail Partnerships were being set up and this could be a mechanism to take this forward.

David Maughan provided information on the workshops he had attended at the Conference 'Dogs in the Countryside' and 'LEPs and LNPs', and it was suggested that this be circulated to members.

In relation to 'Dogs in the Countryside' he referred members to a recent article in the Farmers Guardian regarding the importance of keeping dogs on a lead around livestock. It was suggested that an article be included in 'Durham County News' to raise awareness, and that it should also refer to the importance of controlling dogs around cyclists, horses and blind people.

In conclusion both Roger Cornwell and David Maughan had considered the event to be interesting and useful. Officers from Natural England had conveyed thanks to DCC for the assistance they had received in organising the conference in County Hall and participants were appreciative of the venue and facilities on the day.

AGREED that the information given be noted and an article be included in 'Durham County News' to raise awareness about dogs in the countryside.

ACTION: David Maughan/Jim Welch/Mike Ogden/Victoria Lloyd.

9 National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden reported that a Shadow Partnership had been established for the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway led by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority with proposals for an annual 'northern delivery' meeting involving the North Pennines AONB Partnership. The LAF would link into this through the member representation on North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Mike Ogden

10 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

David Maughan gave an update on progress and advised that it was pleasing to note that the contract of the Paths for All Officer had been extended for the life of the Partnership.

Members were shown photographs of improvements carried out as part of the Flatts Wood project which had secured funding through Paths for Communities and had been supported by the LAF.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

11 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

The Chairman provided an update in relation to the Three Rivers LNP and advised that whilst progress was slow the Partnership should gather momentum once resources were in place. Limestone Landscapes had been identified as one of the delivery partnerships.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

12 Common Land

Tom Bolton advised that no further progress had been made in relation to discussions between relevant Officers of DCC about the future protection and management of Common Land.

AGREED that a further reminder be sent to DCC seeking a response in advance of the next meeting.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to pursue progress.

For information Tom Bolton informed members of new Regulations under Part 1 of the Commons Act 2006 that were due to come into force in October 2014. The Regulations would allow for applications to deregister Common Land and Village Greens in certain circumstances.

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

ACTION: Tom Bolton to update members on progress with the implementation of the Regulations.

13 Dedication of Land/Higher Rights/County Council Policy on Land Disposal

Members were informed that the Sub-Group comprising the Chairman, Roger Cornwell and Angela Johnson had met with Stuart Timmiss and Gerard Darby on 19 February 2014 to discuss outstanding issues regarding dedication of land, higher rights access at the coast and consultations on land disposals.

A letter was sent to Stuart Timmiss following the meeting, a copy of which had been circulated to members for confirmation. It was noted that a response had not been received although Stuart Timmiss had offered a further meeting with relevant Officers from DCC to progress the outstanding issues.

Members were pleased to note that the matter of consultation on land disposals had now been resolved and the LAF would be able to comment on appropriate disposals.

Councillor Foster advised that Stuart Timmiss and his colleagues had been heavily committed to progressing the County Durham Plan. Members acknowledged this and asked that a further letter be sent to DCC asking for a response to the outstanding points in advance of the next LAF meeting when an agreed way forward could be considered.

AGREED that a further letter be sent to DCC seeking a response to the outstanding issues in advance of the next LAF meeting.

ACTION: Chairman/Roger Cornwell/Angela Johnson.

14 Coastal Access

Newsletter

AGREED that the Access Newsletter issued in February 2014 be received.

England Coast path – North Gare to South Bents

Consideration was given to information regarding the commencement of public access rights for North Gare to South Bents and Members were advised that the Durham/Hartlepool/Sunderland stretch of the England Coast Path was to be officially opened on Saturday 12 April 2014 in Seaham. The LAF had been invited to send representatives and Angela Johnson expressed an interest in attending. It was noted that the Ramblers were holding a separate event on 15 April 2014.

AGREED that the information given be noted and Angela Johnson attend the England Coast Path launch on 12 April 2014.

Higher Rights – Blackhall and Crimdon

See item 13.

15 County Council Policy on Land Disposal

See item 13.

16 Membership Issues

In discussing membership issues the Chairman informed members that Ray Partridge was now living and working outside County Durham and that this was a permanent arrangement. He would continue as a member of County Durham LAF unless he gave an indication that it was no longer feasible for him to attend meetings.

With regard to the recruitment of new members Tom Bolton advised that the AGM of the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) was to be held in October 2014 and this could be an opportunity to raise awareness and interest in the work of the LAF. It was suggested that the possibility of Mike Ogden and Rob Trounson attending the AGM to give a short presentation be explored through the Secretary of CDALC.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden/Rob Trounson

17 East Durham Equine Study

Angela Johnson reported that the East Durham Equine Study had not been finalised but was expected to be published around Easter.

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

ACTION: Angela Johnson to pursue progress.

18 Update from Rights of Way Team

Mike Ogden advised that the revenue budget for 2014-2015 had been reduced slightly and therefore the Section needed to review its programme of works such as vegetation cutting for the year.

Ploughing and cropping had commenced by landowners and David Maughan thanked Audrey Christie for the polite reminder sent to farmers about their responsibilities to ensure compliance of paths through their arable fields.

With regard to the landslip in Pelaw Woods which had caused disruption to walkers and cyclists, members were advised that work was underway to establish the cause of the slide and to determine what needed to be done to stabilise the land.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

19 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Delivery/Access Prioritisation/Cycling Strategy

Access Prioritisation

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC with regard to Access Prioritisation. Victoria Lloyd advised that a response had been received confirming support for the next phase of Access Prioritisation in the LTSF area of South Durham and at the suggestion of the Sustainable Transport Manager additional funding would be sought through Natural England to support the projects. It was suggested that arrangements be made for the Sub-Group comprising Roger Cornwell, Geoff Rigden and Ray Partridge to support Officers in the process of co-ordinating and securing funding for the next phase.

AGREED that the letter to DCC be confirmed and the information given be noted.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell/Geoff Rigden/ Ray Partridge/ Victoria Lloyd.

ROWIP

Members were informed that the Rights of Way Implementation Plan was due for review in November 2014 and it was suggested that the LAF Sub-Group comprising Geoff Rigden and Ray Partridge be involved in supporting Officers in the implementation of the new Plan.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Ray Partridge/Victoria Lloyd.

Cycling Strategy

Victoria Lloyd advised that a list of schemes was being pulled together for LTF Infrastructure Improvements.

Nominations were sought for two LAF members to attend a Cycle Infrastructure Design Course on 12 and 19 May 2014.

AGREED that Neil Gander and Geoff Rigden be nominated to attend the course on 12 and 19 May 2014. If either were unable to attend the invitation be circulated to all LAF members seeking two volunteers.

ACTION: Neil Gander/Geoff Rigden.

20 North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group

Mike Ogden provided feedback from the meeting held on 25 February 2014. He advised that the first 'Donate a Gate' scheme had been completed in honour of Bob Pendlebury and a formal dedication ceremony was to be held at Langdon Beck to which Councillor Eddie Tomlinson would be invited.

He also advised that the profile of the Working Group would be raised when it became involved in the National Trails Partnership. It was therefore important that the LAF was represented at future meetings.

AGREED that the information be received and Geoff Rigden or Neil Gander as substitute attend future meetings of the Group.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Neil Gander/Mike Ogden.

21 Work Programme

Consideration was given to the updated Work Programme and it was suggested that Rob Trounson liaise with Officers about topics that he was interested in or where there was a gap in member involvement.

AGREED that the Work Programme be received and updated.

22 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

There were no open access restrictions to report.

23 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Monday 30 June 2014 at 6pm. Potential venues along the coast path be explored with a site visit to rail crossings before the meeting.

24 Any Other Business

a) Influencing the Future of Forestry

The Chairman advised that he had completed a questionnaire on Influencing the Future of Forestry and an initiative to shape a pilot project in the East of England.

AGREED that the Chairman's actions in completing the questionnaire be confirmed.

b) LAF Survey 2013-2014

The Chairman advised that, together with the Vice-Chairman and the Secretary an Annual Survey for 2013/2014 had been completed at the request of Natural England.

AGREED that the completion of the Natural England Survey for 2013-2014 be confirmed.