

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 13 January 2014 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes Chairman

Members of the Forum:

Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster, Neil Gander (until item 10), Brian Hodgson, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Geoff Rigden, Jim Welch and Chris Wiltsher

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Audrey Christie, Victoria Lloyd and Jill Errington

Also present:

Tony Devos – Project Manager, Limestone Landscapes (until item 4)

Robin Trounson - Observer

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Tom Bolton, Ray Partridge and Councillor Tomlinson.

The Chairman informed members of the resignation of Marilyn Gibson from the LAF and it was **AGREED** that a letter be sent thanking her for her valued contribution to the work of the Forum throughout her membership.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chairman referred members to DEFRA Guidance on Local Access Forums which provided advice for members on the rules around declarations of interest.

3 Limestone Landscapes Project

Tony Devos, Project Manager for Limestone Landscapes gave a presentation to members on projects currently being delivered and about sustaining the benefits into the future.

He provided details of the following schemes in the Durham area which included:-

Leg it Across the Limestone Landscapes
Quarries Live
Coastal Grasslands

He gave examples of seven other projects promoting intellectual access within Durham, provided some examples of improvements outside the Durham area and informed members of a Limestone Festival which was due to take place in June/July 2014.

Heritage Lottery Funding had come to an end in December 2013 and consultation had been carried out to look at ways of continuing the good work in the future. A Forward Plan had been produced and proposals should be finalised over the next 2-3 months.

Tony Devos responded to questions from members. Roger Cornwell asked for the Officer's views on the proposed dedication of Cassop Vale as open access land, which was part of the Limestone Landscape.

He responded that he was in favour of the dedication of land as open access as long as it did not cause harm to the key features of a site. At Cassop Vale the main features of interest were either wetland or magnesian limestone grasslands located on a steep hillside and would therefore be unlikely to suffer from increased access.

In response to a question about sustainability he advised that the quarry viewing platforms would be maintained by the quarry owners in perpetuity and for a commuted sum DCC would be responsible for maintenance of the projects for at least 10 years.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2013 - copy attached

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

5 Matters Arising

a) Jubilee Woods Project

Consideration was given to the update provided by Gary Haley which gave details of planting schemes. It was noted that the project was now officially complete but the sites would be maintained for years to come.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

b) MENE Champion

Chris Wiltsher advised that there was no further progress to report to date.

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

ACTION: Chris Wiltsher to keep members informed of progress.

c) 'Sustaining the Commons' Conference

Members were provided with an audit of registered Common Land across the County which listed sites that were either in the ownership of Durham County Council or were unclaimed.

Relevant departments within DCC had been consulted about future management and protection of Common Land and the outcome of discussions was awaited.

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

ACTION: Tom Bolton to pursue progress with the County Council.

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

Mike Ogden and Audrey Christie provided an update in relation to improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way. Members were advised that the Bill had been through the Committee process and should be presented to Parliament in April/May 2014.

The proposals, which reflected ideas put forward by stakeholder working groups, simplified procedures but there were some potential resource implications. Notwithstanding this the Bill was welcomed and it was suggested that a LAF member be asked to keep a watching brief as the proposals were implemented.

AGREED that the information be received and Chris Wiltsher be appointed to keep a watching brief.

ACTION: Mike Ogden/Audrey Christie/Chris Wiltsher.

e) Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

David Maughan informed members that the post of Programme Development Officer had now been filled. Agreement had been reached with landowners for 31 stiles on the Teesdale Way to be replaced with gates. The first phase of the Flatts Wood project had been completed and works to install the new bridges was imminent.

Mike Ogden advised that a consultant had been commissioned to produce a report and photo trail for Flatts Wood which included information about all gradients which would assist less ambulant people. It was hoped that this approach could be adopted for other sites around the Barnard Castle area.

It was pleasing to note that this had been introduced following Jim Welch's advice on the LAF's visit to the site at Flatts Wood last year.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: David Maughan to continue to update members.

f) County Durham Plan

Brian Hodgson referred to minute numbered 7 of the last meeting regarding the County Durham Plan and stated that preliminary works were currently being carried out on the western relief road. As custodians of the countryside farmers were concerned about the timetable for drilling works which could cause irreparable damage to land.

Whilst the concerns of the farmers were appreciated the Chairman reminded members that the LAF's focus was on protecting access for members of the public.

Mike Ogden added that PROW had been consulted on the works and an undertaking had been given by contractors that any damage to paths would be repaired.

It was suggested that Brian Hodgson inform Roger Cornwell and Mike Ogden of any issues where public access had been affected as a direct result of the works.

Cllr Foster invited Brian Hodgson to write to him with any specific concerns about the County Council's actions.

AGREED that the information be received and an update be provided at the next meeting if there were any issues affecting public access.

ACTION: Brian Hodgson/Roger Cornwell/Mike Ogden.

6 National/Regional Issues

a) Natural England

Consideration was given to a written update provided by Jim Milner of Natural England.

AGREED that the information be received and a letter be sent to Rob Aubrook who had recently been appointed as North East Regional Director, congratulating him on his appointment and inviting him to a future meeting to discuss Natural England priorities.

ACTION: Jill Errington to draft letter.

b) National Trails Partnerships

Mike Ogden advised that a meeting was to be held the following day in Leeds to discuss the practicalities around the management of the

partnership. Yorkshire Dales National Park had offered to be the lead partner and consideration was also being given to establishing a northern delivery group based on the North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group.

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

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Mike Ogden.

7 Forestry Commission

The Chairman advised that unfortunately his application to the Forestry Commission's Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee had been unsuccessful as his involvement in forestry had been limited. A list of appointments to the North East Advisory Committee had been circulated to members.

AGREED that the information be received.

8 LAF National Conference

One of two National LAF Conferences was due to be held on Friday 7 March 2014 at County Hall in Durham and nominations were sought for one delegate and a reserve from County Durham LAF to attend.

AGREED that Roger Cornwell and David Maughan be nominated to attend the conference; the members identified to decide on who should be reserve.

ACTION: Jill Errington to submit the bookings.

As Neil Gander had to leave the meeting it was agreed that his report in relation to item numbered 16 on the Agenda be brought forward.

9 Cycling Strategy

Neil Gander provided feedback following his attendance at the 'Love Cycling: Go Dutch' Conference held in Newcastle on 5 November 2013.

AGREED that the information be received and the conference report drafted by Neil Gander be circulated to LAF members.

See also Minute numbered 20.

10 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

The Chairman provided an update in relation to the Three Rivers LNP and advised that progress had been limited by resourcing issues. The LNP had been optimistic that funding would be secured from the North East LEP but unfortunately the bid had been rejected. A further meeting of the Board was due to be held at the end of January 2014.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: The Chairman to continue to update members.

11 Dedication of Land

Natural England NNRs

Consideration was given to a report from Roger Cornwell in relation to the proposed dedication of Cassop Vale NNR as open access land.

In taking members through his report Roger Cornwell advised that following his visit to the site he had been impressed by the views and considered that the dedication should be supported. He had completed the NE assessment form recommending that stiles be replaced by gates and a seat be provided for visitors to appreciate the views. He also suggested that the Church Commissioners should be encouraged to dedicate the land they owned and that the Council be asked if they could improve the verges to make approach on foot safer.

In terms of the potential for equestrian access Angela Johnson had advised that the site was not appropriate as it was not a through route.

AGREED that the LAF offer its support to the proposed dedication of land at Cassop Vale in line with the recommendations in the report.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell to draft response to Natural England and letters to the Church Commissioners and DCC.

Durham County Council

Consideration was given to a letter received from DCC on 13 January 2014 in response to the LAF's request for the Council's views on the dedication of LNRs and linear routes as open access land.

It was agreed that Natural England's views on the Council's response be sought (Roger Cornwell to draft letter) and the offer from Stuart Timmiss of DCC to meet to discuss the matter in more detail be taken up.

AGREED that the information be received and arrangements be made for the Sub-Group comprising of the Chairman, Roger Cornwell and Angela Johnson to meet with DCC.

ACTION: Chairman/Roger Cornwell/Angela Johnson. Jill Errington to seek dates for the meeting.

12 Membership Issues

Mike Ogden introduced Robin Trounson who was a potential new member of the LAF and who was in attendance as an Observer. One further application had been received but unfortunately the applicant had been unable to attend the meeting.

In addition the CLA had agreed to include an article in their newsletter and it was hoped that this would encourage landowners to come forward.

Ray Partridge had informally asked whether he should resign from the LAF as he was working and living out of the area. Members asked whether this was a permanent arrangement and it was agreed that further clarification should be sought from Ray before considering the matter further.

AGREED that the information be received and the recruitment of new members be pursued. Further clarification be sought from Ray Partridge regarding his ability to attend future meetings.

ACTION: Mike Ogden.

13 Coastal Access

Higher Rights – Blackhall and Crimdon

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC seeking further clarification for the Council's reasons for denying higher rights access. A response had been received that day and a copy was circulated to members.

Angela Johnson felt that the response reiterated the views outlined in previous correspondence and it was suggested that the proposed meeting with DCC to discuss dedication of land should also include a discussion around higher rights access at the coast.

AGREED that the information be received and higher rights access at Blackhall and Crimdon be discussed at the meeting to be arranged with DCC (see minute numbered 12).

ACTION: Chairman/Roger Cornwell/Angela Johnson. Jill Errington to seek dates for the meeting.

14 County Council Policy on Land Disposal

Councillor Foster reported that, together with Councillor Tomlinson, they had met with Stuart Timmiss of DCC to convey the views of the LAF in relation to consultation on the disposal of land which may have community benefit.

It had been agreed that the Councillors would meet with Mike Ogden to discuss a process for involving the LAF in respect of certain sites identified for disposal, taking into account commercially sensitive information.

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

ACTION: Councillor N Foster/ Councillor E Tomlinson/ Mike Ogden.

15 County Durham Plan

Consideration was given to the response of the Chairman to the pre-submission draft of the County Durham Plan.

Councillor Foster advised that the responses to the pre-submission draft would be considered by Cabinet in due course and the final submission would be sent to the Planning Inspector towards the end of 2014.

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

16 Health

Healthy Weight Alliance Group 13 February 2014

Nominations were sought for attendance at the next meeting of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group meeting to be held on 13 February 2014 in the Leadership Centre at Spennymoor.

AGREED that the Chairman, Jim Welch and Mike Ogden attend the next meeting of the Group.

ACTION: Jill Errington to forward the papers to the members and Mike Ogden on receipt.

Draft Healthy Weight Alliance Strategy

Consideration was given to the LAF response to the draft Healthy Weight Alliance Strategy.

AGREED: That the response be confirmed.

17 East Durham Equine Study

Angela Johnson reported that the final assessment of the draft Equine Study had not yet been completed, but understood that it was due to be published before Easter.

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

ACTION: Angela Johnson to keep members informed of progress.

18 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie advised that since the last meeting publicity had been carried out in relation to the dedication of the new rights of way. A press release, newspaper article and letter of thanks was handed around to members. The Team were now compiling a further tranche of paths for potential dedication.

She also advised of new provisions under the Local Government Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 which allowed landowners to submit statements under Section 15A(1) of the Commons Act 2006. This would have an impact on the

registration of village greens by bringing to an end any period of recreational use as of right across land.

The fee for making application was £215 which was considered reasonable, comparing favourably with the level of fees charged by other local authorities.

AGREED that the information be received.

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

Victoria Lloyd circulated a compilation of positive feedback and thanks received by stakeholders and users of the Local Transport Plan Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Improvement Schemes.

The Police were keen to work with the Council to encourage students in Durham City to use lights on their bikes. The University had invested in a number of lights for distribution to students. In addition the Police had introduced a campaign called Operation Spoke which was aimed at reducing bike theft. As well as encouraging people to get their bikes security marked, the Police were stopping cyclists to carry out ownership checks.

Members were provided with an update in relation to ongoing Infrastructure Schemes and were informed that Officers were starting to put a list together of projects for next year.

A decision as to whether funding would be secured in 2014 for Access Prioritisation had still not been received. It was felt that the LAF should offer its support and it was suggested that a LAF member take this on board by writing/seeking a meeting with relevant Officers to emphasise the benefits of the Scheme and the importance of funding.

AGREED that the information be received and Geoff Rigden be appointed as lead member to support Officers in securing funding for Access Prioritisation.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Victoria Lloyd.

20 North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2013. The next meeting was scheduled to be held on 25 February 2014 at a venue to be confirmed in Cumbria.

AGREED that the Minutes be received and Geoff Rigden or Neil Gander as substitute attend the next meeting, subject to items of relevance to the LAF being included on the Agenda.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Neil Gander/Mike Ogden.

21 Northumberland JLAF

AGREED that as there were no members available to represent the LAF at the JLAF meeting to be held on Thursday 23 January 2014, apologies be submitted.

ACTION: Jill Errington.

22 Work Programme

AGREED that the Work Programme be updated to include the following topic:-

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group
Implementation of DEFRA Improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way	To keep a watching brief	(Chris Wiltsher)

23 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

The Chairman advised of the receipt of an open access restriction in respect of the following:-

- Hamsterley

A copy of the Notice was available for members at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be received.

24 Minutes of Regional Meeting held on 7 November 2013

AGREED that the Minutes of the Regional LAF Chairs and Vice-Chairs meeting held on 7 November 2013 be received.

25 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Monday 7 April 2014 at 6pm. Potential venues along the coast path to be explored with a site visit before the meeting.

26 Any Other Business

The Chairman agreed that consideration be given to the following items of business:-

27 CR Network Conference

The Chairman advised of the receipt of an invitation to attend the Countryside Recreation Network Conference to be held on 12 March 2014. Unfortunately in view of the cost of the Conference it would not be possible to send a LAF representative.

AGREED that the information be received.

28 DEFRA Research - LNPs

The Chairman advised that he had been invited to take part in an evaluation of LNPs which had been commissioned by DEFRA.

AGREED that the information be received and feedback be provided at the next meeting.

ACTION: Chairman.