

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 22 October 2013 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes

Chairman

Members of the Forum:

Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster (until item 8), Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Geoff Rigden, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson, Jim Welch and Chris Wiltsher

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Audrey Christie, Victoria Lloyd and Jill Errington

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Tom Bolton, Marilyn Gibson and Ray Partridge.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Prior to the commencement of business it was **AGREED** that the order of business be amended to consider the following items of business after the approval of the Minutes of the last meeting:-

Agenda Item 4(d) Commons Conference
Agenda Item 10 Coastal Access
Agenda Item 11 County Council Policy on Land Disposal
Agenda Item 12 County Durham Plan

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 July 2013

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Commons Conference

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC regarding potential issues for the Council in relation to the management of Common Land. Since the Agenda had been circulated a response had been received from Durham County Council, and a copy had been provided to members.

AGREED that a letter be sent to DCC thanking Patricia Holding for the response, requesting that an audit be carried out of Common Land with no registered owners.

and advising that the LAF looked forward to the outcome of discussions between relevant Departments about future management and protection of Common Land.

ACTION: Tom Bolton.

5 **Coastal Access**

Access Newsletters

Consideration was given to 2 Coastal Access Newsletters issued by DEFRA in July 2013.

AGREED that the contents of the newsletters be noted.

Higher Rights – Blackhall and Crimdon

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC in relation to the LAF's request for higher rights access at Blackhall and Crimdon. Members were advised that a response had been received that day and a copy was tabled.

In discussing the response from DCC members felt that further clarification should be sought for the Council's reasons for denying higher rights access, particularly as appropriate public access was being encouraged. Members also questioned how higher rights access would significantly increase management and liability issues and how it would have a detrimental impact on habitats.

AGREED that a letter be sent to DCC seeking further clarification for the reasons for refusing higher rights access at Blackhall and Crimdon.

ACTION: Angela Johnson to draft letter in consultation with Marilyn Gibson.

6 **County Council Policy on Land Disposal**

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC regarding consultation with the LAF on land disposals. A response had been received that day and a copy was circulated to Members.

Members were disappointed that the Council did not feel it was appropriate to consult with the LAF on land disposals because consultation was already carried out with the Rights of Way Team. The LAF considered that it had a broader remit and could potentially add value in advising on the community value of land in terms of access.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that Councillors Foster and Tomlinson convey the concerns of the LAF at their next meeting with Stuart Timmiss.

ACTION: Councillors N Foster and E Tomlinson.

7 **County Durham Plan**

Members were advised that consultation was underway in respect of the pre-submission draft of the County Durham Plan. A copy of the Executive Summary

was circulated at the meeting and members were invited to make any comments on the document. The consultation period ended on Friday 6 December 2013.

Brian Hodgson referred to preliminary works currently being undertaken on the western relief road. Councillor Foster advised that the County Durham Plan was a policy document which set out a Strategy for the development of the whole County and the issue the member referred to would be dealt with at the planning application stage.

The Chairman reminded the member of the need to declare an interest in any matter under discussion that he was directly or indirectly affected by and that this was a point of detail that should not be pursued at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be received and members forward any comments on the pre-submission draft of the County Durham Plan to the Secretary by no later than 29 November 2013 to allow the Chairman to respond by the consultation deadline.

ACTION: Chairman to prepare a response in the light of comments received.

Councillor Foster left the meeting.

8 **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

(a) **Future Arrangements for LAF Meetings**

Members discussed future arrangements for LAF meetings including timing, frequency and locations. This had been prompted by a low turnout at the last meeting of the Forum (AGM).

Roger Cornwell had looked at attendance statistics for a sample of meetings over the past four years and noted that meetings were generally well-attended even at locations outside Durham. Members felt that it was important to continue meeting in venues other than County Hall, incorporating site visits that were relevant to the work of the LAF. They also agreed that the meetings should continue to be held on a quarterly basis at 6pm, but that the AGM should be held earlier in July to avoid a potential clash with summer holidays of Members.

The Chairman asked members to notify the Secretary as soon as possible if they were unable to attend a meeting and provide an update on any topics they were leading on.

With regard to a quorum for the Forum it was suggested that this should be one quarter of the total membership.

AGREED that

- (i) LAF meetings continue to be held quarterly at 6pm at appropriate venues across the County;
- (ii) the quorum of the Forum be one quarter of the total membership.

(b) **Jubilee Woods Project**

Consideration was given to the update provided by Gary Haley which gave details of progress with planting schemes.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

(c) **MENE Champion Update**

Chris Wiltsher advised that there had been no further progress to date and he was waiting for Natural England to arrange a training workshop.

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

ACTION: Chris Wiltsher to keep members informed of developments.

(d) **National LAF Annual Report 2012-2013**

Consideration was given to a letter from the former Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries Richard Benyon MP which had been sent to LAF Co-ordinators regarding the National LAF Annual Report for 2012-2013.

AGREED that the contents of the letter be noted.

9 **Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership**

Members were advised that Charlotte Hursey had left the Partnership in August 2013 and a replacement Officer had been appointed who was to commence her post the following week. It was pleasing to note that £46k of Paths for Communities Funding had been awarded to the Flatts Wood Scheme, for which the LAF had written a supporting letter.

Councillor Tomlinson advised that to ensure that there had been no slippage in service DCC staff had undertaken Charlotte's duties during the recruiting period.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: David Maughan to continue to update members.

10 **National/Regional Issues**

(a) **Natural England**

LAF Newsletter and Natural England Update

Consideration was given to the second issue of the LAF newsletter issued by Natural England. Tom Bolton had agreed to write an article for the next edition regarding 'Sustaining the Commons'. Natural England had invited any thoughts or feedback on the newsletters and the Chairman asked members to give consideration to possible topics for future articles.

Jim Milner had also provided a written update which included early proposals for the LAF National Conference and of changes to the structure of Natural England for 2014/2015. A copy of the update was circulated to members.

AGREED that the information be received.

(b) **LAF Annual Review Pro-forma 2012-2013**

Members were advised that the LAF Annual Review Pro-forma for 2012-2013 had been completed in draft form by the Chairman and Roger Cornwell.

AGREED that the Pro-forma be finalised and sent to Natural England.

ACTION: Chairman/Roger Cornwell/Mike Ogden and Jill Errington.

(c) **Paths for Communities**

Mike Ogden advised that Paths for Communities Funding had now been fully allocated and the scheme had come to an end. An Annual Report would be completed and submitted to DEFRA in due course.

AGREED that the information be received.

(d) **National Trails Partnerships**

Mike Ogden advised that discussions regarding the establishment of a Trails Partnership for the Pennine Way were ongoing and a further meeting was to be held in early November to discuss the selection of a lead Authority from a shortlist.

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

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Mike Ogden.

(e) **News Items**

Consideration was given to the following news items:-

- Cattle and Public Access in England and Wales
- The Countryside Code

AGREED that the information be received.

(f) **Forestry Commission**

Consideration was given to information received about the Forestry Commission's Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee which was currently seeking appointments. The Chairman had expressed an interest in sitting on the Committee and with the support of LAF Members had submitted an application.

AGREED that support to the Chairman's application to the Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee be confirmed.

11 **Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership**

The Chairman advised that although there was no further progress to report it was still early days for the LNP. The Partnership was trying to establish links with the LEP and he would continue to attend meetings of the Board and update the LAF.

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

ACTION: Chairman.

12 **Dedication of Land (Durham County Council)**

Roger Cornwell advised that there was no further progress to report but suggested that the offer made by Stuart Timmiss of joint discussions should be pursued with a view to considering the dedication of LNRs for open access and linear routes as public rights of way.

AGREED that a letter be sent to DCC inviting Stuart Timmiss' comments on the proposals for future dedication.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell/Geoff Hughes/Angela Johnson.

13 **Membership Issues**

Mike Ogden updated members on progress made with regard to the recruitment of new members. He had approached the Secretary of the County Durham Association of Local Councils who had written to all Parish Councils and other avenues to be explored included the CLA and AAPs. Thanks to Jim Welch's recruitment work an application had been submitted which he would follow-up, and

whilst there had been other expressions of interest application forms had not been received to date.

AGREED that recruitment of new members be pursued and members forward details of any individuals who may be interested to Mike Ogden.

ACTION: Mike Ogden.

14 **Health**

Health and Wellbeing Board Engagement Event – 22 October 2013

Jim Welch provided feedback on the Health and Well-being Event he had attended on behalf of the LAF. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness of health issues the NHS would face over the next 10 years and to seek views on how to improve the health and well-being of the population of County Durham.

AGREED that the information be received, and a copy of the papers from the Event be circulated to members.

Healthy Weight Alliance Group Meeting 28 October 2013

It was reported that an invitation had been received for a LAF representative to attend the first meeting of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group to be held on 28 October 2013. LAF members had been given the opportunity to attend.

AGREED that the Chairman be nominated to attend the event.

15 **East Durham Equine Study**

A Johnson reported that DCC had produced a draft Equine Study for East Durham which was published for consultation in August 2013. Marilyn Gibson had responded to the report advising that it was a comprehensive and thorough study of all equine issues in East Durham and was welcomed.

AGREED that the information be received and further information be awaited when the report was publically available.

ACTION: Angela Johnson.

16 **AONB Draft Management Plan 2014-2019 and Access and Recreation Working Group**

Consideration was given to the LAF response to the consultation on the draft North Pennines AONB Management Plan for 2014-2019.

Mike Ogden provided feedback from the North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group held on 20 August 2013 and advised that the Management Plan had been discussed at that meeting, together with the Walking Festival which had been a success. A similar event would be planned in 2014.

The next meeting of the Group was 26 November 2013 at Bowlees at which the LAF would be invited to attend.

AGREED that the response to the draft Management Plan for 2014-2019 be confirmed and Geoff Rigden or Neil Gander as substitute be asked to attend the next meeting, subject to items of importance to the LAF being included on the Agenda.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Neil Gander/Mike Ogden.

17 **DEFRA Improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way - Summary of Responses**

Consideration was given to the summary of responses in relation to DEFRA Improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way. A copy of the document was available at the meeting and a link to the document had been circulated to members.

Mike Ogden and Audrey Christie planned to attend events on the proposed changes in November, and would provide feedback at the next meeting.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Mike Ogden/Audrey Christie.

18 **Update from Rights of Way Team**

Audrey Christie advised that the dedication of 8 new Rights of Way by DCC were almost completed; 6 footpaths and 2 bridleways were to be dedicated, all of which were already well-used.

Officers were congratulated for their efforts and it was suggested that the LAF formally thank the Council once the dedications had been completed.

Audrey Christie also advised of changes to the Durham Volunteer Ranger Service, including the Adopt a Path Scheme, now known as 'Path Volunteers'.

AGREED that the information be received.

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

Victoria Lloyd provided an update in relation to ongoing schemes including Cycle Safety Schemes in Durham City and the new Green Lane at Shincliffe Peth.

There were design issues in respect of the cycle scheme proposed at Gilesgate which were being examined and work was underway on the fencing for the Crook to Howden multi-user route.

National Cycle route no.14 was being re-routed as it travelled through Durham City and re-surfacing works should be completed in time for the Lumiere Event.

Other ongoing works included the Greenways Scheme at Trimdon, the shared route at the Cock of the North and the Shildon to Aycliffe multi-user route.

She continued that authority had been granted for cycle infrastructure design training which would be a one day workshop for Officers but it was hoped that a LAF member would be able to attend.

Neil Gander advised that he was to attend a conference in Newcastle on 5 November 2013 'Love Cycling; Go Dutch' which would look at making towns and cities more cycle friendly. He would provide feedback from the event at the next meeting.

He also reported that Hamsterley Forest had submitted a bid to DEFRA for £60k to expand the cycle trails.

With regard to ROWIP Mike Ogden advised that the second Plan was due to end in 2014. Consideration was now being given to a new Plan for 2014-2017 and this would include how the LAF should be involved in supporting implementation.

AGREED that the information be received.

20 **Cycling Strategy**

See minute numbered 19.

21 **North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group**

See minute numbered 16.

22 **Regional Co-ordinators Meeting**

AGREED that the Notes and Actions from the Regional Co-ordinators meeting held on 12 August 2013 be received.

23 **Work Programme**

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

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group
East Durham Equine Study	Update members on progress with final Report	(Angela Johnson)

24 **Notification of Open Access Restrictions**

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

- Grove Link
- Hamsterley

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

AGREED that the information be received.

25 **Date and Times for Future Meetings**

AGREED that meetings for 2014 be held at 6.00pm on the following dates;

Monday 13 January 2014 – Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham

Monday 7 April 2014 - venue to be confirmed

Monday 30 June 2014 - venue to be confirmed

Monday 6 October 2014 - venue to be confirmed