

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in The Witham at Woodleigh, Flatts Road, Barnard Castle on **Tuesday 16 July 2013 at 6.00 pm**

Present:

Members of the Forum:

Tom Bolton, Geoff Hughes, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson (until item 11) and Jim Welch

Officers:

Victoria Lloyd, Mike Ogden and Jill Errington

Also present: Emma Ashton-Wickett, Paths for All People Officer, Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership (until item 6)

Not present:

Angela Johnson and Brian Hodgson

1 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

AGREED that Geoff Hughes and Roger Cornwell be elected as Chair and Vice-Chair of County Durham Local Access Forum for 2013-2014.

2 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster, Neil Gander, Marilyn Gibson, David Maughan, Ray Partridge, Geoff Rigden and Chris Wiltsher

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Feedback from Site Visit

Members thanked Emma Ashton-Wickett for the site visit around paths identified for improvement in Flatts Wood, Barnard Castle.

In discussing the site visit the Chair commented that the improvement works in the town centre were very good but that the provision of facilities for teenagers should also be considered. Improved signage would also be helpful for visitors.

Jim Welch stated that parts were inaccessible for wheelchair users and that it would be useful to have video and audio footage to demonstrate how steep the gradient was to allow individuals to make a judgement as to the suitability of the path.

AGREED that feedback be received.

5 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

Emma Ashton-Wickett informed members that she had been employed by Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership for a fixed term of 2 years to look at improving public access in projects identified.

She gave a brief presentation to members on the following schemes:-

Flatts Wood

Teesdale Way Enhancement

Cotherstone to Tees Railway Path Extension Project

Development of an easy walk from Bowes Village to Gods Bridge

Barnard Castle to Reeth Route

Following discussion on each project members considered that the Flatts Wood scheme and the proposals for Barnard Castle to Reeth, which were subject to Paths for Communities funding, should be supported by the LAF.

AGREED that letters be sent to Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership expressing the LAF's support for the 2 schemes.

ACTION: Jill Errington, Secretary to draft letters.

6 Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 April 2013

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

7 Matters Arising

(a) Jubilee Woods Project

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

Members were advised that the ownership issues at Lumley Sixth Pit referred to at the last meeting had now been resolved.

AGREED that the information be received.

(b) Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 - Village Greens

Tom Bolton provided an update in relation to the Local Government Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 which came into force in April 2013 and outlined the impact this would have on applications to register land as village green.

AGREED that the information be received.

(c) **National Conference Outputs**

MENE Champion

Members were advised by the Chair that Chris Wiltsher had discussed what the role of MENE Champion would entail with Jim Milner. The Chair advised that a joint training workshop was proposed involving Rights of Way Officers, health and planning professionals.

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

ACTION: Chris Wiltsher to keep members informed of progress.

LAF Priorities 2013-2014

Consideration was given to LAF Priorities for 2013-2014. The Chair advised that following consultation with LAF members 7 priorities had been identified and forwarded to Natural England.

AGREED that the LAF priorities for 2013-2014 be confirmed.

8

National/Regional Issues

(a) **Natural England**

Plan of Engagement

Consideration was given to the Plan of Engagement between Natural England, DEFRA and Local Access Forums. The Plan summarised the role of LAFs and clarified the relationship between LAFs, Natural England and DEFRA.

AGREED that the Plan of Engagement be received.

LAF Newsletter

Consideration was given to the first edition of the LAF Newsletter issued by Natural England on 27 June 2013, a copy of which had previously been circulated to members.

AGREED that the contents of the newsletter be noted.

LAF Survey

Consideration was given to the results of the Natural England survey of LAF Chairs.

AGREED that the information be received.

(b) **Paths for Communities**

Mike Ogden provided an update on projects awarded Paths for Communities funding and advised that almost £1.5m out of the £2m total fund had been allocated to date. Although no applications had been considered in County Durham yet, the 2 projects referred to by Emma Ashton-Wickett at Flatts

Wood and the Barnard Castle to Reeth Route were to be submitted within the next week.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to continue to update members on progress.

(c) **National Trails Partnerships**

Mike Ogden advised that discussions around the establishment of a Trail Partnership for the Pennine Way were continuing. In view of the length of the route there were a total of 13 highway authorities involved, from which a lead Authority would be selected. Once the Partnership was underway the LAF's appointed member, Geoff Rigden would become involved.

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

ACTION: Mike Ogden/Geoff Rigden.

(d) **New Environmental Land Management Schemes in England**

Consideration was given to a joint paper from the Ramblers, the British Mountaineering Council, BHS and the Open Spaces Society in relation to New Environmental Management Schemes in England which the organisations believed would provide an opportunity to develop new programmes to include recreation, tourism and public access related measures.

Members felt that it was a useful paper and that the Government should be urged to take into account the views of these organisations.

It was suggested that a regional voice would add weight and it was therefore **AGREED** that the paper be referred to the Regional meeting to seek the support of other LAFs.

ACTION: Chair.

(e) **National LAF Annual Report - April 2011 to March 2012**

Consideration was given to the National LAF Annual Report for April 2011 to March 2012.

AGREED that the information be received.

(f) **Triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England**

Consideration was given to the DEFRA report in relation to the findings of the Triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England, a copy of which was available at the meeting for members.

AGREED that the information be received.

9 County Durham LAF Annual Report 2012-2013

Consideration was given to the draft LAF Annual Report for 2012-2013, a copy of which was available for members at the meeting.

AGREED that the content of the report be endorsed, subject to the inclusion of a foreword by the Chair.

ACTION: Jill Errington to circulate Report once finalised.

10 LAF Annual Review Pro-forma 2012 - 2013

Consideration was given to the draft Annual Review Pro-forma from Natural England for completion for 2012-2013.

AGREED that the Pro-forma be completed by the Chair in consultation with Mike Ogden and submitted to the next meeting for confirmation.

ACTION: Chair/Mike Ogden.

11 Three Rivers/Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnerships

In noting that there was no further progress to report in relation to the Three Rivers LNP, members were advised by Mike Ogden that the Northern Upland Chain LNP had agreed priorities but that access had not been identified as a key issue at present. It was therefore suggested that no further action be taken in relation to LAF involvement in Northern Upland Chain LNP for the time-being. The Chair would continue to attend meetings of the Three Rivers LNP.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes.

12 Membership Issues

Members discussed possible ideas for recruitment of new members and suggestions included approaching the Area Action Partnerships again as there had been a recent intake of new people, and contacting Stephen Ragg of the County Durham Association of Local Councils. It was also suggested that Lambton Estates be asked for a possible replacement for Matthew Trewartha.

AGREED that the suggestions for recruitment be explored and members forward details of any individuals who may be interested to Mike Ogden.

ACTION: Mike Ogden.

13 Coastal Access

Higher Rights – Blackhall and Crimdon

The Chair reported that Jim Milner, Natural England had responded to the LAFs request for advice following DCC's concerns about the potential impact on coastal nature conservation protected areas.

Jim Milner had advised that as landowner it was DCC's role to make a decision on any proposed changes to the route. The current proposed line of the coastal path was chosen so as to have minimal impact on the SAC. If DCC were to allow higher rights on the same line of the coastal path then NE would expect to be consulted.

As the SAC was a European Site NE was a statutory consultee for the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process, and the proposal would have to go through the HRA process, and be subject to a determination of Likely Significant Effect (LSE) initially, and appropriate assessment if necessary.

A LSE of the higher rights would be considered - in this part of the (HRA) process the consideration was whether there was a pathway by which the proposal could have an effect on the European site (SAC or SPA).

In reference to the current proposed pedestrian coastal access route in Durham the LSE considered the proposed route to have no likely effect on the SAC.

AGREED that Natural England's advice be forwarded to DCC and the Council be asked to reconsider its decision regarding higher rights access at Crimdon and Blackhall.

ACTION: Marilyn Gibson to draft letter to DCC in consultation with Angela Johnson and Tom Bolton.

Coastal Access Scheme

Consideration was given to the new Coastal Access Scheme produced by Natural England which outlined their approach to implementing the Natural England Coast Path and associated Coastal Margin, a copy of which was available for members at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be received.

14 County Council Policy on Land Disposal

Members were informed that DCC had been asked for its views on the feasibility of the LAF being consulted on future proposals for the disposal of Council owned land. Subject to confidentiality issues it was suggested that any relevant land disposals be forwarded to the LAF by Mike Ogden.

A response had not been received to an e-mail from Mike Ogden on 3 May 2013 and to a letter from the Chair sent on 16 June 2013. Members expressed concern at the lack of response and were keen to progress the matter.

It was therefore **AGREED** that a further letter be sent to DCC pressing for a reply and stressing the LAF' s wish to progress the matter.

ACTION: Jill Errington.

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

There was no further progress to report at present but other potential areas for dedication would be explored.

AGREED that progress be pursued.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell to continue to explore potential locations and a Sub-Group comprising the Chair, Roger Cornwell and Angela Johnson be set up to meet with Stuart Timmiss, DCC in due course.

16 **County Durham Plan**

Consideration was given to the update provided by Strategic Planning, DCC in relation to progress with the implementation of the County Durham Plan. Consultation was to take place between October and December 2013 when the LAF would have a further opportunity to comment.

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

ACTION: The Chair to continue to monitor progress.

17 **Commons Conference – 5 July 2013**

Tom Bolton informed members that he had attended a recent conference on 'Sustaining the Commons' on behalf of the LAF and briefly outlined the themes addressed and key findings.

The conference highlighted a number of potential issues for DCC, as Commons Registration Authority, and these were outlined in a handout prepared by Tom Bolton and was circulated to members for consideration.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that the views of DCC be sought on the issues raised.

ACTION: Jill Errington to draft letter to DCC.

18 **Update from Rights of Way Team**

Mike Ogden advised that of the 11 Public Rights of Way identified as potential sites for dedication 9 had been agreed and should be completed by the next meeting.

With regard to the storm damage to paths following last year's severe weather almost all of the works had been completed at a cost of £350k. Members were shown photographs of the finished works at Maiden Castle, which had been the

biggest scheme. Following the landslide at Pelaw Woods it had been agreed that a longer term closure of the affected footpaths was required. The Chair requested details of the damaged paths which he would refer to the Regional LAF for discussion.

At previous meetings during 2012 members had been advised of a judicial review by landowners against the Council's decision to designate byways in Teesdale and Weardale. The Authority had conceded the judicial review and agreement had been reached that some of the routes would be dedicated as restricted byways.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to forward details of the damaged paths to the Chair.

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

Victoria Lloyd advised that current focus was on delivery of schemes identified including new multi-use routes between Crook and Howden, and alongside the section of railway from Shildon to Aycliffe.

A new route was to be created as part of the Great North Cycleway from Blyth to Darlington, with the section from the Cock of the North to the Honest Lawyer, Durham scheduled for completion this year.

As part of the County Durham Plan she had been involved in mapping and setting out strategic cycling routes. The work involved identifying cycling super routes, the upgrade of existing schemes and the creation of new routes.

Other works involved liaising with the Police on a campaign to reduce bike theft with a pilot scheme in Durham City and the LSTF area, and holding roadshows to encourage staff to travel sustainably for business.

AGREED that the information be received.

20 Request for a Scoping Opinion - Birtley Quarry, Station Lane, Birtley

Consideration was given to the LAF response to the request for a scoping opinion for a development at Birtley Quarry, Station Lane, Birtley.

AGREED that the response be confirmed.

21 Ramblers Report on the Reduction of Funding for Rights of Way in England

Consideration was given to the Ramblers Report on the reduction of funding for Rights of Way in England, a copy of which was available for members at the meeting.

AGREED that the information be received.

22 North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group

Mike Ogden advised that the next meeting of the North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 20 August 2013 and it was **AGREED** that Geoff Rigden be asked to attend as the nominated representative.

23 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

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

- Nookton, Newbiggin, Heatheryburn, Whitelees and Bolthope
- Wemmergill

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

AGREED that the information be received.

24 Neighbouring LAFs

Minutes of Tyne and Wear LAF held 21 May 2013

AGREED that the minutes of Tyne and Wear LAF held on 21 May 2013, a copy of which had previously been circulated, be received.

Tees Valley LAF Annual Report 2012-2013

AGREED that the Annual Report of Tees Valley LAF, a copy of which was available at the meeting, be received.

25 Work Programme

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

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group
Common Land	Liaise with DCC on issues around the protection of Common Land	(Tom Bolton)

26 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Tuesday 22 October 2013 at 6pm – venue to be confirmed.