

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Seaham Harbour Marina, Unit 9, Waterside, Seaham, SR7 7BE on **Monday 30 June 2014 at 6.00 pm**

Present:

Members of the Forum:

Tom Bolton, Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster, Ian Gray, Angela Johnson, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson, Robin Trounson and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Victoria Lloyd, Niall Benson and Jo March

1 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

AGREED that Geoff Hughes be elected as Chairman and Roger Cornwell as Vice-Chairman of the County Durham Local Access Forum for 2014-2015.

Roger Cornwell in the Chair

2 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from LAF members Geoff Hughes, Neil Gander, Brian Hodgson, David Maughan, Ray Partridge and Geoff Rigden, and DCC Officer Audrey Christie.

The Chairman welcomed new member Ian Gray to the meeting.

3 Feedback from Site Visit

Mike Ogden presented photographs showing the current public footpath and level crossing at Easington Colliery for members who were unable to attend the site visit.

Members expressed concern regarding poor access, rail safety and public rights of way, in particular no boarded out decking for safe crossing. Mike Ogden advised that he had raised safety concerns with Network Rail and was awaiting a response.

AGREED that feedback be received and the response from Network Rail be reported at the next meeting.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to pursue response.

4 Declarations of Interest

Jim Welch informed members that he had been appointed as a non-voting co-opted member on the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Tom Bolton informed members that he had been re-appointed as a non-voting co-opted member on the Council's Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 April 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

6 Matters Arising

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

Mike Ogden provided an update on the Policy and Legal Framework for Public Rights of Way. Members were advised that the De-Regulation Bill had been through the House of Commons and had its first reading in the House of Lords at the end of June. Some amendments had been introduced to make new provisions to divert paths due to privacy, safety and security. He added that the amendments were similar to DCC's policy already in place however, once it had been passed through the House of Lords it would be a statutory requirement rather than a local policy.

AGREED that the information be noted, and that this item be titled 'Deregulation Bill' at future meetings.

ACTION: Mike Ogden/Audrey Christie to continue to provide updates.

b) County Durham Plan

The Chairman provided an update in relation to the County Durham Plan and advised that the Government appointed an inspector who would be conducting an examination later in the year. The Office of National Statistics had recently published a revised population estimate.

At the LAF meeting held on 7 April 2014 Brian Hodgson raised concerns over damage to agricultural land, footpaths and bridleways in the Baxter Wood area. Mike Ogden advised that a ROW officer carried out an inspection of the area and any damage that had been caused had now been rectified.

AGREED that the information be noted.

7 National/Regional Issues

Natural England

The Chairman provided feedback from the Regional Chairs/Vice Chairs AGM held on the 9 June 2014.

He reported that the North East Combined Authority were now the regional body responsible for transport. Councillor Foster advised that the new authority had a statutory responsibility for overarching strategic plans and for dealing with cross border issues.

AGREED that the information be noted and the minutes of the Regional Chairs/Vice-Chairs meeting held on 9 June 2014 be received.

Annual Review Form

Consideration was given to the Annual Review Form received from Natural England for completion in respect of the year 2013-2014 (for copy see file of minutes).

AGREED that the Annual Review Form be submitted to Natural England.

ACTION: Jill Errington.

MP Letter regarding LAF Annual Report

Consideration was given to a letter received from Dan Rogerson MP thanking Local Access Forums for their work and achievements during 2012/13 (for copy see file of minutes).

AGREED that the MP letter be received.

8 County Durham LAF Annual Report 2013-2014

Consideration was given to the Draft County Durham LAF Annual Report for 2013-2014.

AGREED that the Draft County Durham LAF Annual Report for 2013-2014 be noted and any changes to member's biography information be forwarded to Jill Errington.

ACTION: Jill Errington to finalise report and circulate accordingly.

9 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

Mike Ogden advised that the Flatts Wood project had now been completed and a nomination was sought for a member to attend the celebration event on Monday 7 July 2014 with David Maughan.

AGREED that Roger Cornwell attend the celebration event with David Maughan.

10 National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden reported that the Shadow Partnership established for the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway aimed to have everyone signed up to a full partnership by April 2015. Details of the partnership agreement and how it engaged with wider interests were under consideration.

AGREED that the information be noted.

11 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

Consideration was given to feedback from Geoff Hughes, Chairman regarding the Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership meeting held on 18 June 2014, a copy of which had been circulated to members.

AGREED that the information be noted.

12 Common Land

Tom Bolton provided an update regarding new legislation regarding the de-registration of areas of common land and village greens that had been wrongly registered. He had met with Pat Holding and Jill Errington regarding land that had been wrongly registered and reported that land owners would have to apply to de-register which would be subject to a fee.

AGREED that the information be noted.

13 Dedication of Land

Mike Ogden advised that two proposed dedications of land had been received from Natural England:-

Moor House, Upper Teesdale.

AGREED that it was not necessary to offer any comment on the Moor House, Upper Teesdale as the plot of land was outside the County Durham Boundary.

Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods

AGREED that Natural England be informed of the LAF's support for the proposal for Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods, and that higher rights should not be sought.

Cassop Vale

The Chairman advised that this area of land had been submitted to the Board for approval in March 2014. The dedication instrument had been signed and the new rights would come into force on 14 November 2014.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jill Errington to submit comments on the Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods proposals.

Durham County Council

Consideration was given to the letter sent to DCC regarding outstanding matters in relation to Dedication of Land/Higher Rights Access at the Coast/Consultations on Land Disposals. Members were advised that a response had been received that day and a copy was tabled at the meeting.

Tom Bolton commented on the consultation for land disposal issues for Common Land and Village greens. He advised that Jill Errington had carried out some work on identifying areas of land that the County Council may have an interest in. LAF would like the opportunity to be able to raise issues with the County Council and asked that Pat Holding or Jill Errington circulate details of common land interests to LAF members.

Niall Benson advised that the draft Equine Study was under revision and the final version would be completed by mid-September. Regarding the Heritage Coast, there were increased pressures on the coast as the number of businesses were increasing. A draft management plan was being prepared and would be out for consultation in the summer.

AGREED that the information be received and a further meeting be arranged between the Sub-Group and the Head of Planning and Assets to progress matters further.

ACTION: Geoff Hughes/Roger Cornwell/Angela Johnson/Tom Bolton/Jill Errington

ACTION: Jill Errington forward details of common land interests to LAF members.

14 Coastal Access

Access Newsletter

Consideration was given to the Coastal Access Newsletter issued by DEFRA in April 2014.

AGREED that the contents of the newsletter be noted.

Launch of England Coast Path in North East

The Chairman and Angela Johnson provided feedback from the Launch of England Coast Path in the North East that was held on 12 April 2014.

AGREED that the feedback be received.

Higher Rights – Blackhall and Crimdon

Covered in item number 13

East Durham Equine Study

Covered in item number 13

15 Scrutiny Reviews

Consideration was given to re-visit two scrutiny reviews that were previously circulated by e-mail regarding Access to the Countryside and Access to the Durham Coast.

Tom Bolton commented that the scrutiny reviews that were reported to Cabinet had 12 recommendations and would have had other reviews linked to the report. He suggested that he pursue the actions that had been taken with the Council's scrutiny team.

Angela Johnson added that the recommendations stated that the reviews would be revisited 6 months after the report had been produced.

In response to a question regarding performance indicators relevant to the County Durham LAF, Councillor Neil Foster advised that the quarterly performance report presented to Cabinet would be available on Durham County Council's website.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to pursue the outcome of the scrutiny reviews with the Council's scrutiny team.

ACTION: Jo March to e-mail members the link to the latest performance report presented to Cabinet for information.

16 Health

Mike Ogden provided feedback from the Public Health, Cycling and Active Travel meeting held on 11 June 2014.

Closer links were being made between Public Health, physical recreation and active travel. Public Health had employed a consultant to assess the authority's strengths and weaknesses in terms of cycling, and a working group is to be set up concentrating specifically on this topic. The LAF had been identified as a body that needs to be involved, and it would be useful if the LAF could identify individual members who may wish to participate.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION Jill Errington to email members requesting volunteers to be potential members of the working group.

17 Membership Issues

Mike Ogden advised that 2 new members had recently joined the LAF, however no other expressions of interest had been received. He asked if members had any further suggestions for the recruitment of new members to let him know.

Tom Bolton advised that he had spoken to the Executive Officer of the County Durham Association of Local Councils regarding the possibility of a short presentation on the role of the Local Access Forum at the Association of Local Councils AGM meeting to be held in November 2014.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to pursue.

18 Update from Rights of Way Team

Mike Ogden provided an update from the Rights of Way Team on issues relating to:

- **DCC Land PROW** - DCC Asset Management team would be considering a number of paths that had been identified for dedication at Delves Lane, Haswell Station New Kyo, Sherburnhouse Bank, Tees Bank Plantation and Wellfield School.
- **Landslip at Pelaw Woods** - The Highway Development Manager was working on the capital funding bid to reinstate footpaths and stabilize the slope. The cost was estimated to be in the region of £700,000. Other options may need to be explored as the size of the scheme may not be affordable.
- **Plough Crop Campaign** – almost complete with 183 paths targeted. 2 farmers required legal notices serving with 1 farmer not complying and the Council had to take further measures.
- **P3 groups** – Wolsingham Wayfarers, Medomsley Residents Association, Brandon Village Residents Association were all being entered for Environment Awards this year.
- **Creation Agreements** at Blackhall Rocks at Gainford, Black Horse at Beamish and Flatts Wood at Barnard Castle have been recently signed.
- **Modification Orders** at Kittys Wood and Hamsterley Mill were to be published shortly.

AGREED that the information be received.

19 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Delivery/Access Prioritisation

Victoria Lloyd provided an update on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan Delivery/Access Prioritisation. She advised that work had started on the Plan and the Strategy would remain the same with some updates. The aim was to have the draft version ready for consultation by the end of the year and a sub group would be arranged to provide input.

AGREED that the information be received.

20 Cycling Strategy

Victoria Lloyd provided an update on the Cycling Strategy which was due to be updated next year and advised that the existing strategies and schemes identified last year were ongoing.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Jo March to send written update from Neil Gander to members.

21 North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group

Mike Ogden provided feedback from the meeting held on 21 May 2014 – Lengthy discussions on the C2C cycle route and the potential for an alternative road route down Weardale. Also discussions on Pennine Way 50th Anniversary in 2015, the National Trail Partnership, a report on Bowlees and the unveiling of the Bob Pendlebury memorial gate near Langdon Beck in Teesdale. The second North Pennines Walking Festival is due to take place 27 September to 5 October 2014:- (<http://www.northpennines.org.uk/Pages/NorthPenninesWalkingFestival.aspx>)

It was reported that Geoff Rigden and Neil Gander had experienced difficulty in attending the meetings, and Robin Trounson volunteered to represent the LAF.

AGREED that the feedback be received and Robin Trounson be nominated to represent the LAF on the North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group, following discussions with Geoff Rigden, with Neil Gander to remain as substitute.

22 Work Programme

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

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group 2014-2015
Co Durham Plan		(G Hughes)
Green Infrastructure Strategy	Respond to consultations on local delivery plans	(G Hughes) J Welch
Northern Upland Chain LNP	Represent the LAF at meetings, respond to consultation	(R Trounson)
Dedication of Land (incl Natural England NNRs)]	Explore potential of further areas for dedication	(R Cornwell) Sub-Group: (Roger Cornwell), Geoff Hughes, Angela Johnson
Access Prioritisation	Coordinate LAF involvement/ Support Officers in securing funding	(R Cornwell) G Rigden/R Partridge/J Welch
ROWIP Review	Support Officers to Review ROWIP	(G Rigden/R Partridge/T Bolton)

North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group	Represent the LAF	(R Trounson)/ N Gander
Growth and Infrastructure Act		(T Bolton)
MENE Champion		(R Trounson)
National Trails Partnership		(G Rigden or R Trounson)
De-Regulation Bill	To keep a watching brief	R Cornwell/ A Johnson

23 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

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

- Addey's Gill
- Birk Halt Moor
- Cotherstone Moor
- Dryderdale
- Grove Link Thinning
- Hamsterley Rally
- Neighbour Moor
- Lune Moor

Consideration was given to the proposed response to consultation on open access restrictions at Wolsingham North Moor and Waskerley Park and Wolsingham Park Moor.

AGREED that the information be received and the proposed response to Natural England consultation on open access restrictions be approved.

24 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Monday 6 October at 6pm at County Hall.