



**LOCAL ACCESS
FORUM** County Durham

Annual Report 2013/14

www.durham.gov.uk/laf



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Contents

	Page
1. LAF Purpose and Goals	3
2. Map of area covered by County Durham Local Access Forum	4
3. Chairman's Foreword	5-6
4. Members of the Forum	7-10
5. Dates of Meetings	11
6. Business of the Forum	11-13
7. Highlights of 2013/14	14-15
8. Contacts	16



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM *County Durham*

Purpose

County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory body created under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is independent of the Authority. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act states that the purpose of the LAF is:-

- To advise Durham County Council and others on the improvement of public access to the land in the County for the purpose of the open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area and other prescribed matters.
- In carrying out its function, the LAF will have due regard to the needs of land management and conservation of the natural beauty of the area.

Goals

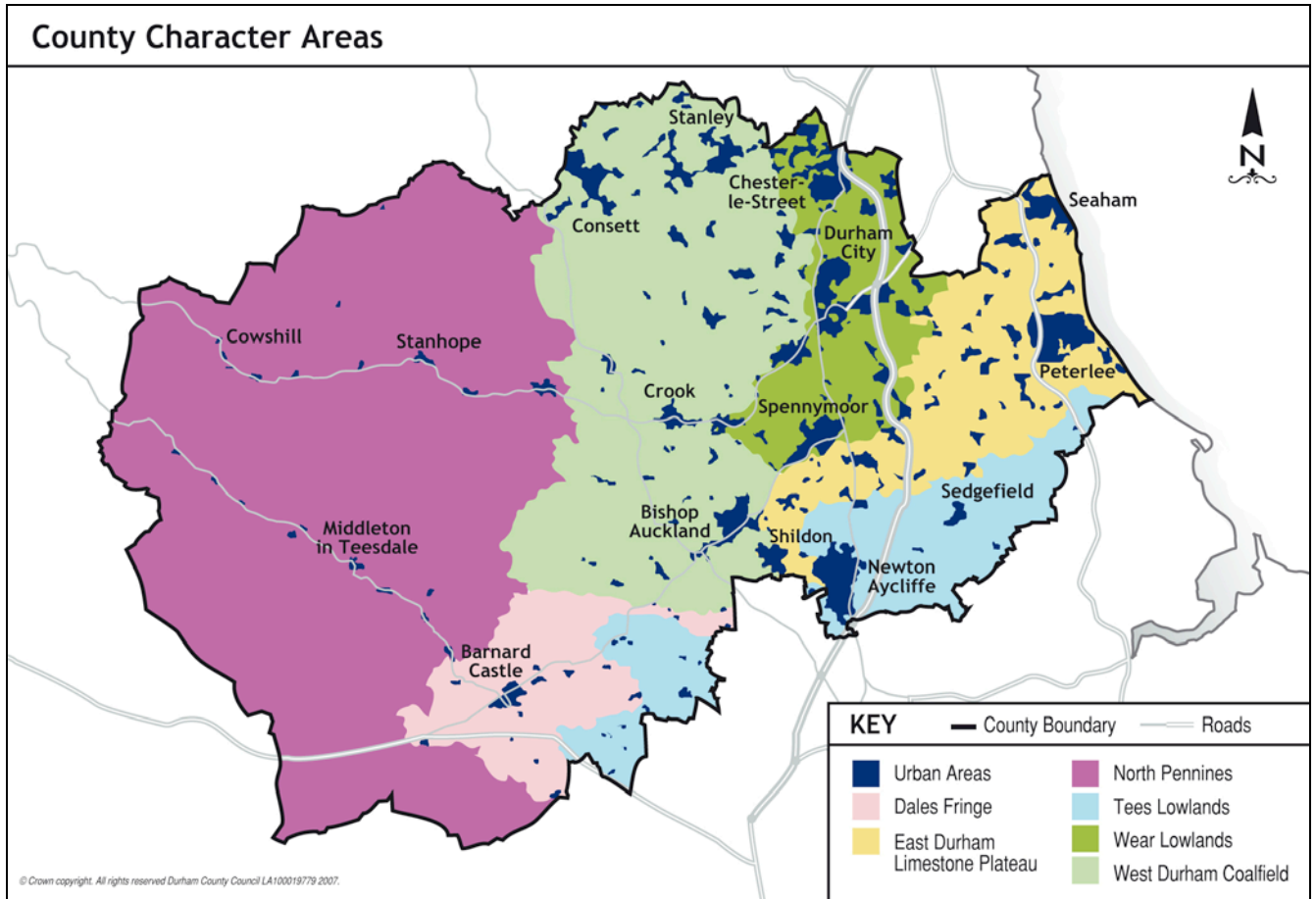
County Durham LAF will champion the improvement and management of access to meet all users' needs, be respectful of land management, promote responsible use and enable participation in healthy outdoor activity. County Durham LAF will work together to objectively advise Durham County Council and others and will make recommendations for the improvement of public access in County Durham.



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

County Durham

Area covered by County Durham Local Access Forum





LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Chairman's Foreword

As always looking back over the year I always ask myself the question – have we made a difference? Well I guess I would like to think so as myself and the other LAF members would probably otherwise call it a day!

Our meetings are always well attended and we have great input from the other organisations we invite along to discuss specific issues such as delivery of the Limestone Landscapes Project and Paths for All People project.

If I were to highlight some things that have happened where we have been noticed perhaps the areas to mention are:

- Support for reinforcing the importance of access and green exercise with the newly established public health team in the County Council.
- The partnership established with the Heart of Teesdale Landscape partnership through one of our landowner representatives
- The establishment of the coast path and our championing of the case for higher rights
- Contribution to the establishment of the Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership by shaping the agenda at Board level
- Input to the successful national LAF conference held in Durham in March of this year.

Over the year we had 4 formal meetings, 1 of which was associated with a site visit examining local access issues and exploring how improvements can be made. Whilst it is not our role to get too involved in local access issues it certainly helped to see some of the issues we are dealing with first hand and I hope our partners also felt that our input was worthwhile.

I would like to thank all the LAF members for giving up their time to attend meetings and for their input to the events and workshops that have taken place over the year. Most importantly I need to mention the sad passing of Chris Wiltsher who was an active member of the County Durham LAF and who made valuable contributions to a wide range of our work. He will be sadly missed.



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM *County Durham*

If anyone reading the report feels that they could play a part in improving access in County Durham and would like to learn more about the work of the LAF or perhaps even join us at one of our meetings then please do get in touch via our Secretary, Jill Errington at laf@durham.gov.uk

Geoff Hughes
Chairman Durham County Local Access Forum



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Members of the Forum

Category

Geoff Hughes - Chairman

Other



Geoff has a broad knowledge of sport and recreation issues. He is a leisure, planning and open space consultant, former independent chairman of the Countryside Recreation Network, CABESpace advisor and a keen cyclist and fun runner.

Roger Cornwell – Vice-Chairman

User



Roger represents walkers and is a former Footpaths Officer for the Durham Group of the Ramblers. He chairs both the City of Durham Trust and the Crossgate Community Partnership. His particular interests are in defending and extending the rights of way network in the County, and believes the Access Prioritisation Project is an important way to achieve this in the present economic climate. He has taken the lead getting the County to dedicate some of its land as Access Land under the terms of the CROW Act. He is also the LAF's "Huddle Champion". Huddle is a web-based forum run by DEFRA where staff from DEFRA and Natural England, and LAF members across the country, can exchange views and information.

David Maughan

Landowner

David is a farmer in south west Durham and represents landowner/occupier interests through his involvement in the National Farmers Union.

Brian Hodgson

Landowner

Brian lives in central Durham and is an experienced landowner and farmer, as well as having been involved in several landowner groups.



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Marilyn Gibson

User (now resigned)

Marilyn is a former teacher, keen horse rider. She is an active member of the British Horse Society and until October 2012 was the BHS County Access and Bridleways Officer.

Neil Gander

User

Neil is a freelance journalist with a particular interest in mountain-biking, having written a guide to the activity within County Durham, as well as being a keen walker and a former voluntary ranger.

Jim Welch

User



Jim is involved with a number of organisations representing blind and partially-sighted people, and other disability groups, including being the founder and chairman of Blind Life in Durham.

Neil Foster

Councillor



Neil is currently the Durham County Council Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development. This role includes strategic transport, the built environment and tourism. Neil is also a board member of Visit County Durham, the local area tourism partnership. He contributes to the role of ensuring that the work of the Forum is linked in to the wider County strategic role.



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Eddie Tomlinson

Councillor



Eddie is currently the Durham County Council Cabinet Member for Housing and Rural Issues and this involves being the Council's Rural Champion. He also represents the Council on the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership, the Limestone Landscape Partnership and North Pennines AONB Partnership. He contributes to ensuring that the work of the LAF is linked in to the wider County strategic role.

Tom Bolton

Other

Tom lives in Teesdale. Prior to early retirement he worked for Durham County Council and during various periods of his career was responsible for drafting statutory rights of way orders and for maintaining the registers of common land and village greens, an area in which he still maintains an active interest. Immediately prior to retirement he was Principal Scrutiny Officer with the County Council, supporting members on a number of projects, including reviews of Access to the Countryside and Access to the Durham Coast. Currently Clerk to Eldon and Staindrop Parish Councils, Tom is also a public member of the Teesdale Action Partnership and is a participant in the Task and Finish Groups for Environment and for Tourism.

Geoffrey Rigden

User

Geoff is a semi-retired teacher living in the Beamish area and has been involved in outdoor pursuits for many years both professionally and personally. He was a member of Sedgefield Countryside Group for many years, working to enable and maintain access in that area. He is a regular user of the extensive ROW system in the Derwentside area, and enjoys running, walking and cycling.

Ray Partridge

User



Ray works for HM Courts and Tribunals Service but is also a Parish Councillor and a former member of Derwentside Trust for Sport and Arts. He is a volunteer for Durham Wildlife Trust and is a keen cyclist, walker and runner.



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Chris Wiltsher

User

Chris Wiltsher was a keen walker, and led and assisted with walks across County Durham. He was a member of the Durham Voluntary Countryside Ranger Service (DVCRS) for many years, engaging in practical countryside management tasks, including public footpath maintenance, in all areas of the County. As a member for several years of the North-East Regional Group of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) he gained detailed knowledge of the planning system and regional rural strategies. Chris played a full role in the Forum throughout the year, and members were saddened to learn of his sudden death on 5 April 2014.

Angela Johnson

User

Angela lives in central Durham and worked as a business analyst. She is an active horse rider and owner, competing in long distance riding for the past 20+ years, and was on the Committee of the Northumberland Durham Group of the Endurance Horse and Pony Society for many years. Angela is a volunteer for the British Horse Society and has been Assistant Access and Bridleways Officer for East Durham since the late 1990s.



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Dates of Meetings 2013/14

The Forum met on the following dates:

- 23 April 2013, County Hall, Durham
- 16 July 2013, Barnard Castle
- 22 October 2013, County Hall
- 13 January 2014, County Hall

Business of the Forum

- Support and advice on implementation of ROWIP in conjunction with DCC Officers
- Continuing to pursue dedication of further areas of County Council land for open access
- Commented on Natural England dedication of NNR at Cassop Vale and continuing to monitor progress
- Regional Co-ordination/Chairs and Vice Chairs meetings/National Local Access Forum Conference/Sustaining the Commons Conference
- Active participation in the Access Prioritisation Project – providing support, advice and feedback. Supported Officers in seeking continuation of the Project from April 2014
- Support and advice on the County Durham Cycling Strategy and Action Plan
- Continued to pursue higher rights coastal access between Blackhall and Crimdon
- Responded to DEFRA consultation on improvements to the Policy and Legal Framework for PROW
- Agreement from Durham County Council for the LAF to be consulted on land identified for disposal which may benefit from public access where appropriate



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

- Received updates on the Paths for Communities scheme and supported the successful P4C bid for Flatts Wood, Barnard Castle
- Responded to consultation on the draft County Durham Plan
- Received updates on Three Rivers LNP
- Received updates on Jubilee Woods Project
- Received updates on Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership
- Received updates from Natural England
- Received Natural England Newsletters and contributed an article on Common Land
- LAF attendance at meetings of the North Pennines AONB Partnership Access and Recreation Working Group
- Continued to look at membership recruitment opportunities
- Working with Health – attendance at meetings of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group
- Responded to consultation on the East Durham Equine Study
- Received updates on the establishment of National Trails Partnerships and appointed a lead member
- Appointed a MENE Champion
- Responded to consultation on the request for a scoping opinion at Birtley Quarry, Station Lane, Birtley
- Received notification of open access restrictions
- Received a presentation on Limestone Landscape Projects and sustaining the benefits into the future
- Responded to consultation on the North Pennines AONB draft Management Plan 2014-2019



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM *County Durham*

- Site Visit to paths identified for improvements in Flatts Wood, Barnard Castle as part of Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Highlights

Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

In September 2011 the Heritage Lottery Fund approved funding for nearly £2M to deliver a variety of projects in the mid Tees Valley, also including a stretch of the River Greta. Many projects were considered for the bid, covering a number of landscape developments, including the improvement of various public rights of way in the area. A key feature has been the involvement of local communities, who it is hoped will participate in developing the schemes over the five year period of implementation. It is an exciting project that could deliver real improvements for Teesdale. David Maughan has taken a particular interest in this project and was involved in the recruitment process for an Access Project Officer in February 2013. The appointed Officer, Emma Ashton-Wickett, made a presentation to the Forum in July 2013, and showed members the paths in Flatts Wood which were the subject of a funding bid to Paths for Communities. This bid was supported by the LAF and was successful, with new bridges and other works completed early 2014.





LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Coastal Access

The Durham/Hartlepool/Sunderland stretch of the coast was chosen by Natural England in 2010 to be one of six 'lead stretches' for the implementation of coastal access under the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The Forum welcomed the opportunities this offered to build on the excellent work done by the Durham Heritage Coast Partnership and the County Council, and to further improve access along the Durham Coast using central government funding. The potential value to tourism in a deprived part of the County was recognised, and the Forum was also keen to explore opportunities for access for horse-riders and cyclists as well as walkers, wherever possible.

The formal opening of this stretch of the England Coast Path took place on 11 April 2014, just after the end of the year covered by this report.





LOCAL ACCESS FORUM County Durham

Contacts

Secretary

Jill Errington
Legal & Democratic Services
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 269703
Email: jill.errington@durham.gov.uk

Access & Rights of Way Team Officers

Mike Ogden (Team Leader)
Access & Rights of Way Team
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 265331
Email: mike.ogden@durham.gov.uk

Audrey Christie
Senior Rights of Way Officer (Training, Enforcement & Caseload)
Access & Rights of Way Team
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 265332
Email: audrey.christie@durham.gov.uk

Travel Planning Team Officers

Victoria Lloyd
Sustainable Travel Officer (Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Cycling Strategy & Projects)
Travel Planning Team
Durham County Council
Telephone: 03000 265311
Email: victoria.lloyd@durham.gov.uk

Forum Website (Contains Minutes of all meetings and Annual Reports):

www.durham.gov.uk/laf

The Forum would like to thank the Officers for their continued support.