

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 6 October 2014 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes - Chairman

Members of the Forum:

Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster, Neil Gander, Ian Gray, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson, Robin Trounson and Jim Welch

Officers:

Mike Ogden, Audrey Christie, Victoria Lloyd-Gent , Niall Benson and Jill Errington

Observer:

Anne Porterhouse – Tyne and Wear LAF

Not Present: Brian Hodgson and Geoff Rigden

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

Geoff Hughes welcomed Anne Porthouse, a member of Tyne and Wear LAF who was in attendance as an observer.

An apology for absence was received from Tom Bolton.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 June 2014

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Matters Arising

a) **Level Crossing – Easington Colliery**

Mike Ogden advised that at a meeting of Network Rails' Road Rail Partnership he had been informed that works to improve the safety of the level crossing by providing a decked surface would commence in January 2015.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) **De-Regulation Bill**

Mike Ogden advised that Parliament had been in recess over the summer so little progress had been made. DEFRA Officers were speaking at an event on 8 October 2014 at which he would attend with Audrey Christie to receive an update.

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

ACTION: Roger Cornwell/Angela Johnson to provide updates on progress with the Bill.

c) **County Durham Plan**

Roger Cornwell advised that examination of the Plan by the Inspector was underway and he and Councillor Foster had attended most sessions. He noted that the Government had issued new Guidance on greenbelt land and this may have implications for the Plan.

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

ACTION: Roger Cornwell to continue to update Members on progress with the Plan.

d) **Scrutiny Reviews**

Access to the Durham Coast
Access to the Countryside

In Tom Bolton's absence the Chairman advised that he had received background information regarding the scrutiny review 'Access to the Durham Coast'. Tom Bolton would keep members informed of his investigations into the outcomes of both reviews.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to provide an update at the next meeting.

5 East Durham Equine Study

N Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer informed members that unfortunately the Study had not yet been completed.

Four routes had been proposed, two inland circular routes and one route along the coast. Unfortunately because of the European Habitats and Species Directive and the numbers using the coastal path the Heritage Coast Partnership could not support the proposed coastal route. Magnesian limestone was unique to this coast and was very fragile. The coastline was eroding rapidly and the route would act as a barrier to species.

The Heritage Coast Management Plan was currently being drafted and the LAF would be consulted on the document. It was suggested that Niall Benson attend the next LAF meeting to present the Plan and the Equine Study with particular focus on access issues and how the recommendations from the scrutiny review 'Access to the Durham Coast' had been addressed.

AGREED that the information be noted and Niall Benson attend the next LAF meeting to consult with members on the Heritage Coast Management Plan.

6 Coastal Access

Consideration was given to two Access Newsletters, an England Coast Path Update and a newspaper article which appeared in The Guardian about walking the north east coast path from North Gare to Seaburn.

AGREED that the information be noted.

Higher Rights – Blackhall and Crimdon

The Chairman advised that following a meeting of the Sub-Group on 22 August 2014 which had been arranged to discuss the outstanding issues with Durham County Council, a further letter had been sent to Stuart Timmiss, a copy of which had been circulated for consideration.

AGREED that the letter to DCC be confirmed and a response be awaited.

ACTION: Angela Johnson/Tom Bolton.

7 National/Regional Issues

Consideration was given to an update from Natural England regarding the following:

- Appointment of Chief Executive, Natural England
- Announcements by the Deputy PM – England Coast Path and Greenspace Mapping
- LAF Engagement Plan

AGREED that the information be noted and Jim Milner be invited to attend the next meeting to give an update on Natural England matters.

8 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

David Maughan advised that the Partnership was still very active and was a role model for others. He gave details of recent events which included a walk along the River Greta. Mike Ogden added that key to its success had been the appointment of a dedicated Officer to manage project delivery.

AGREED that the information be noted.

Flatts Wood Celebration Event

David Maughan and Roger Cornwell provided feedback in relation to the Flatts Wood celebration event held on 7 July 2014. The event involved a walk along the footpath which was well-used, and the members considered that the improvements were of great benefit to Barnard Castle.

Mike Ogden added that Emma Ashton-Wickett had commissioned an audit of the footpath for people with access difficulties. Jim Welch advised that on the site visit with the LAF last year he had found the gradient difficult on the way back and suggested that information and photographs of the path would be useful. An audit would help individuals make their own judgement as to whether the path was accessible.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: David Maughan to continue to provide updates.

9 National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden gave an update on progress with the Shadow National Trails Partnership established for the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway. The LAF would have an input through its representation on North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Robin Trounson/Geoff Rigden/Mike Ogden to provide updates.

10 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

The Chairman advised that following a slow start progress was now being made following the appointment of a dedicated Officer. He had been invited to a Sub-Group meeting to discuss project implementation and to identify 'quick-wins'.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: The Chairman to continue to provide updates.

11 Dedication of Land

Durham County Council

Roger Cornwell advised that as agreed by the Sub-Group at its meeting on 22 August 2014 a letter would be sent to DCC to request that the potential for dedication of open access land remain under consideration by the Council, and to ask if Officers could continue to look at possible areas for dedication.

AGREED that a letter be sent to Durham County Council.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell to draft letter.

Natural England – Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods

Roger Cornwell advised that as agreed at the last meeting the LAF had conveyed its support to Natural England for the dedication of Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods. It was pleasing to report that although the dedication had not been confirmed to date, an announcement was expected in the near future.

AGREED that the information be noted.

12 Common Land

Consideration was given to the letter sent to Durham County Council following the Sub-Group meeting held on 22 August 2014 and members were advised that a response was awaited.

AGREED that the information be noted and a response from DCC be awaited.

ACTION: Tom Bolton to continue to provide updates on progress.

13 Membership and Promotion of the LAF

In discussing membership the Chairman advised that LAF member Ray Partridge no longer lived or worked in County Durham and had advised that it was difficult for him to contribute to the work of the Forum.

Ray had played a valuable role on the LAF but in view of his change in circumstances it was suggested that he be asked to confirm that he wished to give up his position on the Forum.

The Chairman asked if it would be possible for members to be provided with LAF name badges for their attendance at meetings of other organisations. In view of the limited budget Councillor Foster suggested contacting Visit County Durham who may be able to assist.

Members discussed promotion of the work of the LAF and Angela Johnson suggested including an article in County Durham News. Robin Trounson also suggested exploring the possibility of the LAF being quoted in any press releases about projects/events that had it had been involved with.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jill Errington draft a letter to Ray Partridge.

Mike Ogden contact Visit County Durham for assistance with the supply of name badges for members.

Angela Johnson draft an article for inclusion in County Durham News.

14 Health

Public Health, Cycling and Active Travel

Mike Ogden advised that a small Officer group involving Public Health, Sustainable Transport, and Leisure and Culture had been established, and the LAF had been invited to participate in a wider consultation group. The Chairman had volunteered to represent the LAF and nominations were sought for one other member to be involved.

AGREED that the Chairman and Neil Gander represent the LAF as and when the Group was established.

Everybody Active, Everyday Consultation

Consideration was given to Government consultation Everbody Active, Everyday. The Chairman advised that a lot of the issues were about infrastructure and planning but that he had informed Dawn Phillips, Portfolio Lead that the LAF was very keen to support Durham's Public Health Team.

Robin Trounson noted that the consultation linked to the MENE Agenda and he would discuss progressing his role as MENE Champion with Jim Milner.

AGREED that the information be noted.

Healthy Weight Alliance Working Group

The Chairman provided feedback from the Healthy Weight Alliance Working Group meeting held on 29 September 2014. This wide-ranging Group was starting to deliver some good outputs. The LAF's involvement was to champion improvements to access to the outdoors. The Minutes of the meeting would be circulated when available.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Jill Errington to circulate Minutes.

15 The Locomotion Way

Robin Trounson and Jim Welch provided feedback on their attendance at the inauguration of The Locomotion Way.

The members advised that the event was well-attended and talks were given along the route on the local wildlife, geology and railway history. The only negative issue was the safety of the crossing at Spout Lane. Looking ahead there was a potential for linking The Locomotion Way to other rights of way to create a route to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of the Shildon-Stockton Railway.

Victoria Lloyd-Gent confirmed that the crossing at Spout Lane was to be improved with options currently being explored.

AGREED that the LAF'S congratulations and appreciation be sent to Durham County Council on the inauguration of the Locomotion Way.

ACTION: Robin Trounson to draft letter.

At this point it was agreed that items numbered 21 and 24 on the Agenda be brought forward to allow Roger Cornwell to leave to attend another meeting.

16 Heritage Way

Roger Cornwell provided background to the former Heritage Way which was a walk in Tyne and Wear that also crossed into the boundaries of Northumberland and County Durham. He understood that Tyne and Wear LAF were interested in resurrecting the route.

Mike Ogden noted that part of the route crossed the site that was subject to a planning application for opencast works at Marley Hill. The route also covered much of the 'Land of Oak and Iron' and this had been brought to the attention of the Partnership as a possible project.

The Chairman suggested that an audit of the whole route would be useful to establish the feasibility of resurrecting the Heritage Way.

AGREED that Officers from the various Authorities discuss the feasibility of reinstating The Heritage Way.

ACTION: Mike Ogden.

17 Open Access Restrictions

Consideration was given to the Decision Notice regarding Wolsingham North Moor and Waskerley Park and Wolsingham Park Moor following the LAF's comments on the proposed restrictions.

Roger Cornwell advised that it was pleasing to report that Natural England had revoked both directions.

AGREED that the information be noted.

18 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie advised that six footpaths identified for dedication as Public Rights of Way were due to be completed in the next few weeks. These were routes that were already well-used by local people.

The revenue budget had been reduced this year by around 10% and it was therefore pleasing to report that funding had been secured from LTP, Limestone Landscapes and the Neighbourhoods Budgets of local Councillors to carry out footpath schemes in a number of locations. Funding had also been secured from

the developers of the Nevilles Cross New College site to improve pedestrian access into the city.

The budget for cutting back had been reduced by 10% and this year had experienced one of the highest vegetation growing rates in around ten years.

The Team had secured a number of creation agreements where landowners had agreed to put footpaths on the Definitive Map.

Two complaints had been made to the Local Government Ombudsman but provisional views received indicated that the Council had acted appropriately.

Councillor Tomlinson complimented the Officer for accessing the Neighbourhoods Budgets of Councillors to fund improvements to footpaths in their wards. Local Members were keen to look after the paths in their Divisions and this was a useful source of funding to help to achieve this.

AGREED that the information be noted and the Rights of Way Team be thanked for their efforts.

19 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that the review process had commenced and the next steps were to update the action tables and arrange an information sharing meeting with Public Health. Once the Action Plans had been completed she would arrange a meeting of the Sub-Group.

Members considered the letter from Dan Rogerson MP which encouraged LAFs to continue their work in offering advice to local highway authorities as ROWIPS were reviewed.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Geoff Rigden/Tom Bolton/Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

20 Access Prioritisation

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that LSTF funding had been secured for Phase 3 of the Access Prioritisation to be carried out in the Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe areas. A Business Case had been submitted to Procurement for the appointment of a consultant and a decision was awaited on this. The funding had to be spent by March 2015.

The Sub-Group would be re-convened once the consultant was in post.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell/Geoff Rigden/Jim Welch/Victoria Lloyd

21 Cycling Strategy

Neil Gander referred to a policy statement issued by CTC urging cyclists to use footpaths which had led to a discussion on HUDDLE about the law around this. He asked whether LAFs would be supportive of footpaths being used by cyclists and the Chairman suggested that this could be a topic for discussion at the Annual Conference.

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that the Cycling Strategy was due for review in 2015 and until this time work was ongoing to deliver improvements through the Annual Work Programme.

Funding had been secured to commence work on cycle audits starting with six of the 12 main towns. This work would enable improved network management.

The Section had a work placement at present who was auditing the condition of National Cycle Network 1.

She also hoped to commission a piece of work to look at how railway paths connected to other networks and was looking for funding to undertake this.

Councillor Foster asked if the Bright Bike Campaign was being undertaken in Durham again this year. Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that this had been a successful campaign in partnership with the Police but unfortunately because of time constraints and costs there were no plans to resurrect it again this year.

AGREED that the information be noted.

22 North Pennines Access and Recreation Working Group

A copy of the draft Minutes of the last meeting held on 4 September 2014 were circulated to members for information.

Robin Trounson provided feedback from the meeting advising that 2015 was the 50th anniversary of the Pennine Way and lots of celebrations were planned.

Working Group members were also provided with an update on the alternative Weardale Coast to Coast cycle route and the North Pennines electric bike network had commenced with hire points in place.

Other discussions included access considerations in respect of the creation of the Great Upland Forest, and access issues on the Moorhouse to Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Robin Trounson or Neil Gander to continue to attend meetings of the Working Group when the business was relevant to the work of the LAF.

23 Notification of Open Access Restrictions

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

- Hamsterley Forest Enduro
- Brown Law

AGREED that the information be noted.

24 Work Programme

The Chairman suggested that it would be useful for members to set tasks and targets for the own work areas identified in the Work Programme. He asked members to give consideration to this for inclusion in the Work Programme in future and to review identified targets at the next meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted and the Work Programme be updated to include the following additional area of work:-

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group 2014-2015
Public Health, Cycling and Active Travel		(G Hughes and N Gander)

ACTION: All members to consider tasks and target dates for their own work areas. Jill Errington to send revised work programme format to members for inclusion of targets.

25 Consultation on Dog Control Orders

The Chairman advised that the Council had carried out a consultation exercise regarding proposals to introduce a Dog Control Order on Seaham Beach but the LAF had not been identified as a consultee. He suggested that the Council be asked to consider consulting with the LAF in future on strategic matters regarding the implementation of Dog Control Orders.

AGREED that the information be noted and Durham County Council be asked to include the LAF on future consultations.

ACTION: Jill Errington to send e-mail to DCC.

26 Future Presentations

The Chairman asked members to give consideration to future presentations to the LAF with effect from the April 2015 meeting.

AGREED that suggestions for future presentations be forwarded to Jill Errington.

27 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Monday 19 January 2015 at 6.00pm at County Hall, Durham.

ACTION: Jill Errington circulate dates for 2015 to members.

28 Any Other Business - Dogs in the Countryside

David Maughan referred to the importance of keeping dogs on a lead around livestock which was becoming a national problem. This had been discussed at the meeting in April 2014.

Mike Ogden advised that the Government had consulted on a new 'Dogs in the Countryside' leaflet which was due for publication in March 2015.

AGREED that the LAF promote the new Government publicity material following its release.

ACTION: David Maughan.