

COUNTY DURHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 19 January 2015 at 6.00 pm**

Present: Geoff Hughes (Chairman)

Members of the Forum:

Roger Cornwell, Tom Bolton (after item 8), Councillor Neil Foster, Neil Gander, Angela Johnson, Geoff Rigden and Jim Welch

Officers:

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

1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chairman welcomed Jim Milner from Natural England to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Ian Gray, Brian Hodgson, David Maughan, Geoff Rigden, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson and Robin Trounson.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 October 2014

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

4 Coastal Access

a) East Durham Equine Study and Heritage Coast Management Plan

Members received a presentation from Niall Benson, Principal Heritage Coast Officer on the findings of the East Durham Equine Study and the draft Heritage Coast Management Plan, with particular focus on Recreational Pressures and Impacts.

Members also considered the letter received from DCC regarding higher rights access which made reference to both documents and the importance of protecting the Heritage Coast.

In discussing the draft Plan and letter from DCC, members considered the importance of reconciling potential conflicts between nature conservation

and the promotion of tourism and recreation. Niall Benson acknowledged that access was being encouraged and that consideration should be given to how additional users would be managed to prevent damage to the habitat.

AGREED that

- (i) The findings of East Durham Equine Study be received;
- (ii) a response to the draft Heritage Management Plan be submitted by 23 February 2015
- (iii) the letter from DCC regarding higher rights access be received.

ACTION: Tom Bolton/Angela Johnson to draft response to Heritage Coast Management Plan.

b) **Scrutiny Review – Access to the Durham Coast**

Members noted that the recommendations in the Scrutiny Review had been addressed within the draft Heritage Coast Management Plan.

AGREED that the information be noted.

c) **England Coast Path**

Mike Ogden advised that the Partnership, comprising Heritage Coast and the 3 Local Authorities had commissioned an audit of the route to define maintenance priorities for 2015/16. The survey would be carried out in the near future.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to provide updates.

d) **Level Crossing – Easington Colliery**

Mike Ogden advised that works to provide a decked surface at Easington Colliery were going ahead but that Network Rail had indicated possible closure of all level crossings. At a meeting he had attended with Niall Benson, Network Rail had acknowledged the importance of the crossings at Easington Colliery and Hawthorn Hive and had given an indication that if these crossings were closed in future they may be replaced with footbridges.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Mike Ogden to provide further updates.

5 **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

a) **De-Regulation Bill**

Roger Cornwell reported on progress with the De-Regulation Bill. A few amendments were debated in the House of Lords but the package agreed by the Stakeholders Working Group was carried. The Bill was not yet at the Reports stage and MPs had extended the parliamentary time to 30 March 2015.

AGREED that the information be noted.

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

b) **County Durham Plan**

Roger Cornwell reported that the 1st stage examination of the draft Plan had been completed and provisional conclusions were expected before the end of February 2015.

Household projections for the County were awaited. The Office of National Statistics had projected population figures to 2027 and the Department for CLG would use these figures to project the number of households. Durham County Council proposed to include an additional number of properties to those projected to allow for economic growth it hoped to bring into the County.

Councillor Foster explained that expansion was necessary to ensure that the County remained economically viable and would be achieved through managed development. Recent news had demonstrated that the most successful cities were those that had embraced expansion.

AGREED that the information be noted.

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

c) **The Locomotion Way**

AGREED that the letter sent to DCC congratulating Durham County Council and Network Rail on the inauguration of The Locomotion Way be received.

d) **Heritage Way**

Mike Ogden advised that a meeting of Local Authorities and the Ramblers Association was planned for mid-February to discuss the feasibility and implications of reinstating the Heritage Way. It was suggested that a LAF member be appointed as a point of contact if a decision was made to proceed with the reinstatement.

AGREED that the information be noted and Roger Cornwell be appointed as the LAF contact.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell/Mike Ogden to provide updates.

e) **Consultation on Dog Control Order – Seaham Beach**

The Chairman reported on the outcome of a consultation exercise regarding proposals to introduce a Dog Control Order on Seaham Beach. The majority of respondents were against the proposal and felt that most dog owners were responsible. The decision was therefore made to continue to allow dogs on Seaham beach all year round.

The LAF had not been identified as a consultee and as agreed at the last meeting Durham County Council had been asked to include the LAF on future consultations.

AGREED that the information be noted.

6 National/Regional Issues

a) Update from Natural England

Jim Milner reported of proposals to employ additional resources dedicated to coastal access, although no formal announcement had been made to date.

Natural England potentially faced more budgetary cuts in 2015/2016 and there was to be a big focus on income generation.

A new Chief Executive Officer had been appointed who was supportive of access.

Regionally he advised that a decision had not yet been made on funding for the Regional Co-ordinator for next year. His own role was changing but he would continue to push for access to be a focus of Natural England.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) LAF Newsletter Issue 5

AGREED that Issue 5 of the Access Newsletter be received.

c) Access Newsletter

AGREED that Access Newsletter Issue 65 be received.

d) Update from Regional Co-ordinator

Consideration was given to an update provided by Beryl Bird, Regional Co-ordinator.

Jim Milner advised of a series of access factsheets available on HUDDLE which would update the LAF Handbook.

The Regional Co-ordinator's update included reference to the requirement of Appointing Authorities to provide 'reasonable training needs' and the Chairman considered that it would be useful to canvas members about what they felt their training requirements were and how they could be met bearing in mind budgetary limitations.

AGREED that the information be noted, and members to consider what training might be required.

e) North of England Access Strategy

Consideration was given to proposals to develop a North of England Access Strategy and a scoping report that had been drafted by Ted Liddle for comment by the other Regional Chairs/Vice-Chairs.

Jim Milner had commented that the visibility of LAFs was a good secondary benefit, but were the means to the end of better access and the economic and health benefits that would follow. The document should focus on the LAFs championing access. It was hoped that funding could be secured to employ a consultant to write the Strategy.

Roger Cornwell informed members that this had been raised at the Regional Chairs/Vice-Chairs meeting and he considered that the discussion at that meeting should be included in the scoping report.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Chairman to submit comments on the scoping report by 23 January 2015.

f) **LAF National Report 2013/2014**

AGREED that the LAF National Report for the year April 2013 to March 2014 be received.

g) **MENE**

Consideration was given to the report of Robin Trounson which advised how the MENE survey could be used to support County Durham's strategic agenda and seek a steer on the way forward.

The Chairman agreed with the views that MENE could be used to inform Public Health in County Durham. He suggested that Jim Milner and Robin Trounson attend a future meeting of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group to give a presentation about MENE and how it could be meaningfully used.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Robin Trounson/Jim Milner.

h) **Biodiversity 2020 – A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem**

Consideration was given to the report of Robin Trounson regarding DEFRA Performance Indicators on 'public use and enjoyment of the natural environment' and 'taking action for the natural environment'.

AGREED that the information be received and Robin Trounson be thanked for his work on this and MENE.

i) **Outdoors for All 2014**

AGREED that Natural England Case Stories for 2012-2014, a copy of which had been e-mailed to members be received.

7 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

Mike Ogden advised that the Partnership would come to an end in 2016 and was looking at how projects would be maintained thereafter. He hoped that the LAF would be consulted for its views on this.

He was pleased to report that the Donate-A-Gate scheme in the North Pennines had been extended to include the Teesdale Way.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: David Maughan to continue to provide updates.

8 National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden advised that a national recruitment exercise was underway for a Pennine Trails Partnership Manager and that he was on the interview panel. Surveys were being carried out which would determine the maintenance bid for the Pennine Way for 2015/2016. The Northern Working Group had met on 3 December 2014 and had discussed its approach to maintenance and how to involve the wider community.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Robin Trounson to continue to provide updates.

9 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

The Minutes of the Board meeting held on 9 December 2014 were received, together with the Project Initiation Document for Bright Water, a landscape partnership for the River Skerne.

The Chairman advised that he was a member of the Interim Board for the project which hoped to secure funding in order to conserve and enhance the heritage within the catchment of the River Skerne and to make it more accessible. The Stage 1 Bid for funding would be submitted in March 2015.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Chairman to continue to provide updates.

10 Dedication of Land

a) Durham County Council

Roger Cornwell advised that as previously agreed he would send a letter to DCC requesting that the potential for dedication of open access land remain under consideration by the Council, and to ask Officers to continue to look at possible areas for dedication.

AGREED that a letter be sent to Durham County Council.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell.

b) **Natural England**

Roger Cornwell reported that an announcement regarding the dedication of Derwent Gorge and Muggleswick Woods was still awaited.

The LAF had previously commented on the dedication of Cassop Vale NNR and had noted that part of the site was owned by the Church Commissioners. It was suggested that a letter be sent asking that the Church Commissioners consider dedicating the area of land in their ownership as open access land.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell to draft letter to the Church Commissioners.

11 Common Land

Common Land

Consideration was given to the letter received from DCC, and Tom Bolton welcomed the agreement to set up an Officer Working Group to determine policies for the management and protection of Common Land and Village Greens in County Durham. He offered to be involved with the Group when constituted.

AGREED that the information be received.

ACTION: Tom Bolton pursue the establishment of the Officer Working Group.

12 Scrutiny Review - Access to the Countryside

Tom Bolton advised that he would research the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review to establish whether there were any that had not been addressed and which should be pursued by the LAF.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Tom Bolton.

13 Membership and Promotion of the LAF

The Chairman advised that Ray Partridge had confirmed that he wished to give up his position on the LAF as he was now living and working outside the area and a letter had been sent thanking him for his contribution to the work of the Forum. He had advised that he had enjoyed his time as LAF member and had sent his best wishes.

Mike Ogden advised that he would pursue the provision of name badges for LAF members with Visit Durham.

Members were informed that Angela Johnson had drafted an article promoting the work of the LAF for inclusion in County Durham News.

AGREED that the information be noted.

14 Health

a) **Public Health, Cycling and Active Travel**

Mike Ogden advised that no further progress had been made in establishing the wider consultation group which would involve the LAF Chairman and Neil Gander.

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

ACTION: Chairman/Neil Gander.

b) **Healthy Weight Alliance Group**

The Chairman reported that the next meeting of the Group was on 5 February 2015 but that he was unable to attend. Mike Ogden advised that he would be in attendance and would seek the Group's views on a presentation by Robin Trounson and Jim Milner about MENE.

AGREED that the information be noted and Mike Ogden provide feedback at the next LAF meeting.

15 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie provided an update in relation to LTP funded projects. £30k of footpath improvement works were ongoing.

The footpath scheme at Seaham funded from LTP and Limestone Landscapes was underway.

Members were informed of a Modification Order to put footpaths at Kitty's Wood in Roddymoor on the Definitive Map. No objections had been received to the Order.

The dedication of 6 footpaths as Public Rights of Way were awaiting completion. There had been a slight delay due to Officers being involved with the Housing Stock Transfer.

A geotechnical designer had been employed to produce a permanent solution for the Pelaw Woods landslide. Works included the removal of material, the creation of stepping and drainage improvements. The estimated cost was £400k.

Mike Ogden advised that as part of 'Durham Ask' one Parish Council had expressed an interest in taking on responsibility for Rights of Way in their Parish.

AGREED that the information be noted.

16 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that the review process was progressing. The Action Plan and timetable had been updated and a meeting of the Sub-Group would be convened.

AGREED that the information be noted.

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

17 Access Prioritisation

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that Phase 3 was underway and consultants Ethos Environmental Planning had been appointed. The Sub-Group would be contacted directly by the Consultants to arrange the next steps.

AGREED that the information be noted.

ACTION: Roger Cornwell/Geoff Rigden/Jim Welch/Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

18 Cycling

a) Cycling Strategy

Neil Gander reported of consultation regarding improvements to the A690 West Rainton cycle path. Comments submitted that cyclists should be given priority at junctions had led to a change in design.

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that the Cycling Strategy was due for review this year and would be undertaken following the ROWIP review.

Work had commenced on the cycle audits of the 12 main towns which would improve the management of the network.

The Work Placement Officer had completed the audit of NCN 1. The work had been filmed and she suggested that it be shown to the LAF at a future meeting.

AGREED that the information be noted.

b) Government Consultation – Cycling Delivery Plan

Consideration was given to responses submitted by Durham LAF and the Regional LAF to Government consultation. Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that an expression of interest would be submitted but funding criteria had yet to be announced.

AGREED that the information be noted and the responses to consultation on the Cycling Delivery Plan be received.

ACTION: Neil Gander/Geoff Rigden/Victoria Lloyd

19 North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group

Neil Gander provided feedback from the North Pennines Tourism Seminar he had attended on 17 November 2014. The Seminar encouraged businesses to get involved in the AONB and a survey of residents which sought their views on visitors to the area had received positive responses.

Mike Ogden advised that Robin Trounson had attended the meeting of the North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group held on 3 December 2014 but the minutes were not yet available.

Mike Ogden had attended a meeting in October 2014 which discussed a number of potential upgrades of footpaths to cycle routes and the removal of some stiles on the Upper Teesdale NNR.

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.

20 Open Access Restrictions - Consultations

Consideration was given to consultation on Natural England's review of a number of existing open access restrictions in County Durham. Members views were sought on the draft response prepared by Robin Trounson.

In discussing the proposed response Mike Ogden advised that the main reason for the restriction at Widdybank Fell was because of the presence of sugar limestone.

AGREED that the proposed response be agreed with an additional comment that the LAF understood the reasons for the restriction for Widdybank Fell but felt that this had not been made clear in the consultation document.

ACTION: LAF Secretary to send response to Natural England.

21 Work Programme

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

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group	Task	Target Date
Heritage Way	Point of contact	(Roger Cornwell)		

ACTION: Members to consider tasks and targets for their own work areas and forward to Jill Errington.

22 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

AGREED that the next meeting be held on Monday 20 April 2015 at 6.00pm in the Civic Centre, Crook with a site visit beforehand to view footpath improvements at Kitty's Wood, Roddymoor.