

## **COUNTY DURHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Council Chamber, Crook on **Monday 20 April 2015 at 6.00 pm**

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the LAF, Tom Bolton was appointed to chair the meeting.

**Present:** Tom Bolton (Chairman)

**Members of the Forum:**

Ian Gray, Neil Gander, Angela Johnson, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson and Jim Welch

**Officers:**

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

**Not present:** Brian Hodgson

### **1 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Geoff Hughes, Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster, David Maughan, Geoff Rigden and Robin Trounson.

### **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3 Feedback from Site Visit**

Audrey Christie and Angela Johnson provided feedback from the site visit to view footpath improvements at Kitty's Wood, Roddymoor. The land had been sold by Durham County Council and previously well-used footpaths had been closed off by new landowners. These footpaths had now been registered.

Angela Johnson noted that there were many footpaths in that area which were obviously well-used and was pleased that they would now be protected.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### **4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 January 2015**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

## 5 Matters Arising

### a) **De-Regulation Bill**

Angela Johnson and Mike Ogden reported that the Bill had now received Royal Assent but the Rights of Way clauses would not come into force for another year. Regulations were expected in advance of the implementation date.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Angela Johnson/Mike Ogden to provide further updates when there was progress to report.

### b) **Scrutiny Review – Access to the Countryside**

Tom Bolton advised that he had examined the recommendations from the Scrutiny Review and all seemed to have been addressed with the exception of dedication of land which was being pursued by the LAF.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## 6 National/Regional Issues

### a) **Regional Co-ordinator Funding**

Consideration was given to the letter received from Natural England regarding the demise of Regional Co-ordinators. Mike Ogden advised that Beryl Bird had played a valuable role in supporting LAFs regionally, and on behalf of members the Chairman had thanked her for her support during her time as Regional Co-ordinator.

Members were informed that at the next meeting of the Regional Chairs/Vice-Chairs, Natural England would discuss how it would support the LAFs at a regional level in future.

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

### b) **LAF Annual Review Pro-Forma 2014/2015**

**AGREED** that the LAF Annual Review Pro-Forma for 2014/2015 be confirmed.

**ACTION:** Jill Errington to return form to Natural England.

### c) **Summary of Evidence: Access and Engagement**

**AGREED** that the summary of Natural England's assessment of evidence relating to access and engagement be received.

### d) **MENE**

Consideration was given to a report by Robin Trounson which advised members how MENE survey data was being used by the South Pennines Local Nature Partnership.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Robin Trounson to continue to provide updates.

e) **Northumberland JLAF**

Angela Johnson provided feedback from the joint meeting she had attended on 22 January 2015. Following a training session on public rights of way a workshop was held to work out priorities for Northumberland LAF. She noted that their members were very involved with monitoring and maintenance of public rights of way.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

f) **LAF News**

**AGREED** that LAF News Issues 6 be received.

**7 Coastal Access**

a) **Heritage Coast Management Plan**

Consideration was given to the LAF's response to the draft Heritage Coast Management Plan. Angela Johnson informed members that Niall Benson had thanked the LAF for its comments on the document and had advised that he was working towards producing a final draft for wider consultation.

**AGREED** that the LAF response be noted and further developments be awaited.

**ACTION:** Angela Johnson/Tom Bolton to keep members informed of progress.

b) **Coastal Access Newsletters**

**AGREED** that Coastal Access Newsletters Issues 67 and 68 be received.

**8 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership**

In David Maughan's absence Mike Ogden advised that the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership was in its final year, however the Paths for All Officer continued to be involved with projects, including improvements to the Teesdale Way, developing the Greta Way, and proposed new bridleways around Lartington and Barnard Castle.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** David Maughan to continue to provide updates.

## 9 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

### a) **Healthier and Wealthier North East**

Members received a leaflet 'A Healthier and Wealthier North East' which gave information about the 3Rivers LNP initiative, and themes and projects for 2015.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### b) **Bright Water Landscape Project**

Consideration was given to a report by Geoff Hughes which provided an update on progress regarding the Bright Water Landscape Partnership Project for the River Skerne. The report also informed members that Geoff Hughes had recently been invited to become Chair of the Interim Board Partnership.

**AGREED** that the report be received and the appointment of Geoff Hughes as Chair of the Interim Board Partnership be endorsed.

**ACTION:** Geoff Hughes to continue to provide updates.

## 10 National Trails Partnership

In the absence of Robin Trounson and Geoff Rigden, Mike Ogden provided an update in relation to the National Trails Partnership. He advised that the Pennine Trails Partnership Manager had now been appointed and was aware of the challenges facing the Partnership in terms of budgetary constraints of the authorities involved.

Mike Ogden also reported on the interim partnership for the England Coast Path in the North East, and proposals to extend the Trail as far as Filey which would involve additional local authorities. An Officer from Natural England would be in attendance at the next partnership meeting to discuss the feasibility of having a single partnership for this stretch of the Coast Path.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Robin Trounson/Geoff Rigden to continue to provide updates.

## 11 County Durham Plan

Consideration was given to the report by Roger Cornwell which gave an update on the County Durham Plan following the release of the Inspector's interim report. Councillor Tomlinson advised that since the update DCC had met with the Inspector to discuss the findings. A Member Seminar had been held to advise County Councillors who considered planning applications what weight should be given to Local Plans, National Planning Policy and the emerging County Durham Plan.

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

**ACTION:** Roger Cornwell to continue to provide updates.

## **12 Dedication of Land**

### **a) Durham County Council**

Members were informed that a letter would be sent to DCC requesting that the potential for dedication of land as open access land remain under consideration by the Council.

### **b) Natural England**

Members were informed that a letter would be sent to the Church Commissioners asking that they consider dedicating the land in their ownership at Cassop Vale NNR as open access land.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Roger Cornwell to draft letters to DCC and the Church Commissioners.

## **13 Common Land**

Tom Bolton advised that as far as he was aware no further progress had been made following agreement by DCC to set up an Officer Working Group to consider policies for the management and protection of Common Land and Village Greens.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and a reminder be sent to DCC asking if any progress had been made and to suggest that Tom Bolton be involved with the work of the Group once established.

**ACTION:** Tom Bolton to draft reminder letter to DCC.

Jill Errington advised of new Regulations which had come into effect in December 2014 which allowed for applications to deregister Common Land and Village Greens in certain circumstances. The LAF would be consulted on applications received and a member was sought to lead on this.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and Tom Bolton be appointed as the LAF contact to respond to consultations.

**ACTION:** Tom Bolton to provide updates on applications received.

## **14 Membership and Promotion of the LAF**

Mike Ogden reported that the article Angela Johnson had written for County Durham News promoting the work of the LAF had been submitted but had not yet been published.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## 15 Health

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

Neil Gander provided feedback from the meeting he had attended on 5 March 2015.

The Group discussed proposals to provide a fleet of cycles to allow children who did not have their own to take part in Bikeability Cycle Training in schools.

He considered that a key message to emerge from the meeting was the need for a better cycle path network and infrastructure.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Geoff Hughes/Neil Gander to continue to provide updates.

### b) **Coastal Walk4Life Event**

Mike Ogden advised of a walking event to be held on Sunday 10 May 2015 along the coast from Blackhall Rocks to Crimdon. Participants would meet with walkers from Hartlepool before returning to Blackhall Rocks.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## 16 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie reported that the dedication of 6 routes as Public Rights of Way had now been 'signed off' and were due to be signposted shortly. There were proposals for further dedications in future.

The Team were working with landowners to create public paths by creation agreements, and one at New Brancepeth had recently been completed.

With regard to the Pelaw Woods landslide members were informed that a permanent solution had been agreed and funding was in place. The works were expected to take place over the winter months.

Members were also advised of the outcome of the independent ROSPA report into the safety of Durham River Banks. The report did not have major implications for the Rights of Way Team with only minor surface improvements recommended for footpaths. The full report was available to view on DCC's website.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## 17 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review

Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that the Sub-Group had met regarding ROWIP3 and an early draft had been produced for initial views from internal colleagues and the LAF Sub-Group. Any comments would be incorporated into a further draft for wider consultation. A copy could be provided to members on request.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **18 Access Prioritisation**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that Phase 3 was progressing well. The site surveys had been carried out but consultation had been extended in view of the extensive area and the number of groups involved. A launch event would be planned in due course.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

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

## **19 Cycling**

### **a) Cycling Strategy**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that the new Cycling Strategy was on hold until the North East Transport Plan was sorted.

Angela Johnson referred to the revised cycle road markings near Whinney Hill and was advised that the layout had been changed following safety audits.

Neil Gander made the comment that the provision of cycle paths was often overlooked when highways were designed, and reiterated the need for improved infrastructure nationally.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### **b) LAF Initiative**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported on complaints received from cyclists about punctures caused by trimmings left following hedge-cutting by landowners. It was also a problem for parents with prams and pushchairs. Members discussed a proposed initiative to raise awareness among landowners about the importance of tidying up after cutting back hedgerows.

Jim Welch also considered that landowners should be encouraged to cut overgrown hedges which blocked footpaths and presented problems for cyclists, pedestrians and guide dogs.

**AGREED** that a press release/guidance be drafted over the summer months for release in the autumn in time for the cutting season.

**ACTION:** Neil Gander/Geoff Rigden/Victoria-Lloyd Gent.

### **c) Cycling Delivery Plan**

Neil Gander advised that a summary of responses had been produced following a series of consultation meetings on the proposed Walking and Cycling Strategy which also included the Government's views. A key

outcome was that not enough money had been identified per person for cycling and although the Government was obliged to report how much it proposed to spend this was not a commitment. The Government had also said that there was no need for a minimum cycling infrastructure design standard in England at this time.

There was no further progress with regard to the submission of an expression of interest for funding as the criteria was not yet known.

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

**ACTION:** Neil Gander/Geoff Rigden/Victoria Lloyd-Gent.

## **20 North Pennines AONB Access and Recreation Working Group**

In the absence of Robin Trounson, Mike Ogden provided feedback from the meeting held on 24 March 2015. He advised that the Group was interested in pursuing proposals for a northern section of the Pennine Bridleway and a route had been mapped to take it beyond Hexham.

A BBC television programme was celebrating 50 years of the Pennine Way and the forthcoming episode related to the North Pennines.

The Group also discussed the future of the National Byway, a private initiative for a cycling route around the whole of England. It was introduced 10-15 years ago and was sponsored by Hovis but over time the signs had become neglected and the route was largely unknown. The Group proposed to discuss the future of the signs following a request from the local community for their removal and he asked for the LAF's views on the matter.

Members noted that the signs posted quiet lanes and roads but did not have a specific destination, and also noted the costs that would be incurred for their removal.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and members be kept informed of developments regarding the National Byway.

**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, and to keep members informed of progress regarding the National Byway.

## **21 Open Access Restrictions**

### **a) Consultations**

Consideration was given to the LAF response to proposed open access restrictions for Teesdale Allotments, Widdybank Fell, Hole Head and Guys Moss, West Allotment, Langdon, South Crossthwaite Common and Atkinsons Peat Allotment.



**AGREED** that the response be confirmed.

Members were informed of a second consultation in respect of Lambshields, a copy of which was circulated at the meeting. The LAF had offered no objections to the original consultation which sought to renew an existing restriction. The revised proposal sought to vary the end date of the restriction from 31 July 2016 to 8 May 2021.

**AGREED** that no objections be offered to the proposed restriction in respect of Lambshields.

b) **Notifications**

Tom Bolton advised of the receipt of open access restrictions in respect of the following:-

Wellhope Moor  
Killhope Moor, Little Killhope, Bramsike and Priorsdale  
Wemmergill Moor  
Wemmergill Moor and Holwick Moor  
Hamsterley  
Sharnberry  
Cotherstone Moor

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**22 Work Programme**

**AGREED** that the Work Programme be updated to remove Limestone Landscapes and to include the following additional areas of work:-

Topic	Role	Member (Lead) and Group	Task	Target Date
Common Land and Village Greens – Applications to De-Register	To respond to consultation on applications	(Tom Bolton)		
Bright Water Landscape Project	Chair of Interim Board of Partnership	(Geoff Hughes)		

**23 Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting**

**AGREED** that the next meeting, the AGM, be held on Monday 6 July 2015 at 6.00pm. In discussing the venue it was suggested that the meeting be held in County Hall, Durham unless there were any suggestions from members for a suitable alternative venue with site visit.

**ACTION:** Members contact Jill Errington with any suggestions for a site visit/venue.