

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **County Durham Local Access Forum** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 6 July 2015 at 6.00 pm**

### **Present:**

#### **Members of the Forum:**

Tom Bolton, Roger Cornwell, Councillor Neil Foster (until item 5), Ian Gray, Brian Hodgson, Geoff Hughes, Angela Johnson, David Maughan, Geoff Rigden, Councillor Eddie Tomlinson (until item 21), Robin Trounson and Jim Welch

#### **Officers:**

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

### **1 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**

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

Roger Cornwell informed members that this would be his last meeting as he was resigning from the Forum due to other commitments on his time.

The Chairman stated that Roger Cornwell would be greatly missed and on behalf of all the members expressed thanks and gratitude for his support and contribution to the Forum since its inception.

**AGREED** that a letter of thanks be sent to Roger Cornwell.

### **2 Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Neil Gander.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

It was **AGREED** that the order of business be amended to allow consideration to be given to the following Agenda item as Councillor Foster had to leave the meeting.

### **4 County Durham Plan**

Roger Cornwell provided an update on the current position with regard to the County Durham Plan. He advised that the Council had launched a judicial review and a 4 week stay had been granted to allow for further negotiations. This would expire on Friday 10 July 2015.

Councillor Neil Foster added that a meeting of all interested parties was to be held prior to the expiry date to hopefully achieve a resolution and avoid a judicial review.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 April 2015**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

## **6 Matters Arising**

### **a) Members views on site visits**

A general discussion ensued on site visits and whether members considered them to be useful to the work of the Forum.

Members were of the view that site visits were of use if they were topical to the work of the LAF and requested that early notification be given prior to a visit being arranged.

Members were encouraged to come forward with any suggestions for site visits in future.

**AGREED** that the LAF continue to hold site visits when deemed useful to the work of the Forum.

### **b) Heritage Coast Management Plan**

Angela Johnson informed members that the process of assessing evidence from the initial consultation was ongoing and the final draft had not yet been produced for wider consultation.

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

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

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

In the absence of Neil Gander, Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that it was unlikely that the current Government would now produce a Cycling Delivery Plan as it was reviewing its approach to this.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **7 National/Regional Issues**

### **a) Minutes of the AGM of the North East LAF Chairs**

**AGREED** that the minutes of the AGM of the North East LAF Chairs held on 19 May 2015 be received.

b) **Training Needs of LAF members**

Members discussed training needs of LAF members. Suggestions included an induction session for new members and the provision of information about the different organisations that the LAF was involved with.

Mike Ogden commented that there was a lot of knowledge and expertise from within the LAF itself which could be shared amongst members, and the Chairman suggested that a half hour training session in advance of LAF meetings would be useful.

Tom Bolton agreed to do the first session on Common Land and Village Greens.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and a training session be provided in advance of the next meeting on Common Land and Village Greens.

**ACTION:** Tom Bolton.

**8 LAF Annual Report 2014-2015**

Consideration was given to the LAF Annual Report for 2014-2015.

Robin Trounson suggested that the report should include a definition of each category of membership and also that acronyms should be explained and avoided as much as possible. He also noted that the Report listed activities carried out by the LAF but suggested that in future it could be structured around the Work Programme with members contributing to the report in respect of their own topic areas.

**AGREED** that the comments be taken on board and the Annual Report for 2014-2015 be confirmed.

**ACTION:** Jill Errington to circulate Annual Report.

**9 Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership**

David Maughan reported that the Partnership had successfully achieved improvements to a number of local footpaths and small villages such as Romaldkirk and Gainford had greatly benefitted from projects. The drive and enthusiasm of Emma Ashton-Wickett, Paths for All Officer had been key to the success of the Partnership, as were the involvement of local volunteer groups, many of whom were keen to continue work beyond the life of the Partnership.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and the Paths for All Officer be invited to a future meeting of the LAF to review the achievements of the Landscape Partnership Project.

## 10 Three Rivers Local Nature Partnership

### a) 3Rivers LNP

The Chairman advised that he had attended a quarterly meeting in June when the main focus had been on strengthening the links with the LEP. There had been a suggestion that 3Rivers should merge with Northumberland Lowlands LNP.

### b) Bright Water Landscape Project

A bid for funding of £2.2m had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Environment Agency had committed to providing £200k to the project. He expected the HLF to assess the Bid and give a decision in October 2015.

A letter of support had been sent to Durham Wildlife Trust who had drafted the Bid, which members were asked to confirm.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and the letter of support be confirmed.

**ACTION:** The Chairman to continue to provide updates.

## 11 National Trails Partnership

Mike Ogden reported that the Pennine Trails Partnership Manager was now in post and surveys of the Pennine Way and Bridleway were to be completed before the winter weather, enabling bids for the following year to be submitted in time for works to be carried out. Options for managing the Pennine Way and Bridleway were also being explored.

Discussions on a single Partnership for the England Coast Path were underway but were in the early stages until paths to the south of the region were officially opened in the next 12 months.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## 12 North Pennines AONB Partnership

### a) Annual Forum

Robin Trounson provided feedback from the Annual Forum held on 26 June 2015 which was a celebration of work carried out over the year.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### b) Access and Recreation Working Group

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2015 and the feedback from Robin Trounson following his attendance at the Working Group meeting held on 24 June 2015.

**AGREED** that the Minutes be received and the information be noted.

c) **Pennine National Trails Northern Working Group**

Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2015 and the feedback from Robin Trounson following his attendance at the Working Group meeting held on 24 June 2015.

Robin Trounson referred to the North Pennines Walking Festival to be held between 26 September and 4 October 2015, and noted that promotional information was not yet available. Richmond's Walking Festival was held at the same time and had been well-publicised.

Mike Ogden advised that the lack of publicity was due to limited resources. In contrast Richmond's Walking Festival was well-established with sponsors supporting the event. The two festivals coincided as there were a number of joint events.

The Chairman asked if members felt that attendance at the Working Groups was of benefit to the work of the LAF. Robin Trounson advised that it was useful as an opportunity to network with other organisations and LAFs, and to discuss issues of common interest.

Mike Ogden added that from the AONB Partnership's perspective it was important to liaise with a wider group of people and the Working Groups were a good sounding board which helped steer its work.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

### 13 Dedication of Land

a) **Durham County Council**

Roger Cornwell proposed that a letter be sent to DCC suggesting that there was land in the Council's ownership to which the public already had *de facto* access where dedication would regularise the position and which would serve as an example to other land owners. Examples of areas suitable for dedication included Pity Me Carrs Local Nature Reserve and Crowtrees Local Nature Reserve.

**AGREED** that a letter be sent to DCC suggesting the dedication of Pity Me Carrs and Crowtrees Local Nature Reserves, and inviting Officers of DCC to meet with LAF members to discuss these and other potential sites.

**ACTION:** Geoff Hughes and Angela Johnson.

b) **Natural England**

The LAF had previously agreed to write to the Church Commissioners asking them to consider dedicating land in their ownership at Cassop Vale. Roger Cornwell advised that the Church Commissioners had since sold the land in their ownership and it was considered that dedication should not be pursued at present, a view that was shared by Natural England.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and no further action be taken.

#### **14 Common Land**

Tom Bolton advised that a reminder had been sent to DCC on 27 April 2015 with regard to the agreement by DCC to consider setting up an Officer Working Group to consider policies for the management and protection of Common Land and Village Greens. A response had not yet been received.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and a further reminder be sent to DCC.

**ACTION:** Tom Bolton to draft further reminder.

Tom Bolton provided feedback from the Realising the Commons Workshop he had attended on 1 July 2015. The key objectives of the event were to identify potential uses of common land to provide open air recreation for the public whilst furthering nature conservation and biodiversity, to consider how land could be dedicated as common and be protected by legislation, and to manage new commons to reconcile the needs and interests of both landowners and the public.

Presentations were received from Natural England, Newcastle University and the former chief legal adviser to the CLA.

A further Workshop was to be held on 18 November 2015 to look at planning for new Commons and making new Commons a reality.

Tom Bolton added that Jim Milner of Natural England had asked him to draft an article on the workshop for the LAF newsletter.

**AGREED** that the information be noted, and an article be prepared for inclusion in the LAF Newsletter.

**ACTION:** Tom Bolton.

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

The Chairman expressed disappointment that the article Angela Johnson had prepared for inclusion in County Durham News had not yet been published.

Mike Ogden advised that he would pursue the provision of ID badges for LAF members for their attendance at meetings of outside organisations.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Mike Ogden pursue progress with the article for County Durham News and the provision of ID badges.

## 16 Health

### **Healthy Weight Alliance Conference A Call to Action: Strengthening the Whole System**

Consideration was given to the report of Robin Trounson and Jim Welch on the Healthy Weight Alliance Conference held on 22 May 2015.

Robin Trounson advised that the Strategic Framework for Healthy Weight in County Durham for 2014-2020 had been launched at the conference and asked how the LAF should be involved. MENE data was important to the Healthy Weight Alliance as one of the key indicators and he would remind the Group of the offer to give a presentation on the subject at one of their future meetings.

The Chairman advised that the LAFs contribution was advisory and specifically to support the importance of access to the outdoors. He suggested that the LAF be represented at meetings of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group where there were items on the Agenda relevant to the work of the Forum.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and Robin Trounson pursue the offer of a presentation with Jim Milner on MENE at a future meeting of the Group.

**ACTION:** Robin Trounson and/or Jim Welch continue to attend meetings of the Healthy Weight Alliance Group when there were items on the Agenda relevant to the work of the Forum.

## 17 Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway 1825 Conference

Mike Ogden provided feedback from the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway 1825 Conference held on 17 June 2015 which discussed proposals for celebrating the bi-centenary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Part of this was to provide a walking/cycling trail following the original route from Stockton to Darlington.

Councillor Tomlinson, Tom Bolton and Ian Gray were also in attendance at the Conference.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## 18 Update from Rights of Way Team

Audrey Christie reported that this year's ploughing and cropping campaign had been successful and less time-consuming than in previous years.

Works on the Pelaw Woods landslide would commence in September 2015 with completion expected by Easter 2016. LTP funding was being used for the reinstatement of the footpaths.

Riverside safety proposals in Durham City had been published on the Council's website.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

## **19 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review**

Angela Johnson expressed concern that the deadline to respond to the draft ROWIP3 had now passed but she had not had an opportunity to comment.

LAF comments from the Chairman, Geoff Rigden and Tom Bolton would be incorporated into the final document. Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised that the deadline had been extended to 17 July 2015 for Parish and Town Councils and this would provide an opportunity for Angela Johnson to comment.

In response to a question about the North East Combined Authorities Victoria Lloyd-Gent advised of proposals for a Strategic Transport Plan for the combined authorities, which included walking and cycling. DCC would continue to lead on its own ROWIP and Transport Plan.

**AGREED** that the information be noted and the LAF comments be incorporated into the Plan.

## **20 Access Prioritisation**

Victoria Lloyd-Gent reported that a meeting with the Consultants was scheduled in mid-July to consider their report on the revised matrix which had originally been designed for the 1<sup>st</sup> phase. The Sub-Group would be asked to examine the report and confirm the revised matrix.

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**ACTION:** Geoff Rigden and Jim Welch examine the proposals in the Consultant's report.

At this point Councillor Tomlinson left the meeting.

## **21 Notification of Open Access Restrictions**

### **a) Consultations**

i. **AGREED** that the following Decision Notices be received:-

- Lambshields
- West Allotment
- South Crossthwaite Common
- Atkinson Peat Moss Allotment
- Teesdale Allotments

ii. **AGREED** that the response to the second consultation in respect of Widdybank Fell and Guy's Moss and Hole Head, be confirmed.



b) **Notifications**

The Chairman reported the receipt of notifications in respect of the following:-

- Dog Exclusion Order - Pikestone Fell and Bollihope Common
- Dog Exclusion Order – Cotherstone Moor Field Reeves

**AGREED** that the information be noted.

**22 Work Programme**

The Chairman asked members to review the Work Programme and update their own work areas. Volunteers were also sought for the topics formerly undertaken by Roger Cornwell.

**AGREED** that the Work Programme be sent to all members to update, and any member interested in undertaking the work formerly carried out by Roger Cornwell should advise the LAF Secretary.

**ACTION:** All members to update.

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

**AGREED** that the next meeting be held on Monday 5 October 2015 at 6.00pm in County Hall, Durham with a training session by Tom Bolton on Common Land and Village Greens at 5.30pm.

It was also **AGREED** that Network Rail be invited to give a presentation at the meeting.